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ABSTRACT

This guide is designed for reform-jaded superintendents who, in spite of everything, still want to promote excellence in their schools. After a brief introductory chapter, chapter 2 reviews nine well-known national reports, most of which offer little help to superintendents. The guide recommends three books "High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America" (Ernest Boyer), "A Place Called School" (John Goodlad), "The Troubled Crusade: American Education 1945-1980" (Diane Ravitch); all provide educators with school improvement information and increased understanding of salient issues. Chapter 3 tackles four school reform myths, beginning with America as a "nation at risk" headed for a "high technology future." Equally erroneous are notions of state-financed education and "more is better." To further identify reform pitfalls, chapter 4 outlines school improvement traps such as the effective school recipe, the computer cure-all, the time-on-task fallacy, and the "great principal" notion. The heart of school reform efforts is really the central office, as chapter 5 suggests. Instead of mandating reform, superintendents must learn how to facilitate it. Numerous improvement strategies concerned with managing school autonomy, staff development, curriculum building, and resource allocation are offered. The sixth chapter outlines strategies for enlistment of staff, use of community resources, and encouraging parent involvement, while the seventh chapter concentrates on curriculum, testing, and teacher effectiveness. The last chapter outlines tips to share with staff. Two appendices offer information about programs and hundreds of notes and additional reading suggestions. (MLH)

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A Response to the National Reports on School Reform

The Superintendent's Can-Do Guide to School Improvement

Marcella R. Dianda

Council for Educational Development and Research
Washington, D.C.

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Foreword

Nearly any northern Plains resident can tell you the prescription for starting a cold, stalled car when all has failed. First, open the hood and stare at the engine. Then slam the hood shut. Hard. Next, walk around the car, kicking it as you go. Glance at your watch and throw an arm across your forehead. Curse, if you're so inclined, but do it with feeling. Open the hood and slam it down again, louder. Finally, repeat the entire procedure.

Now all these antics do absolutely nothing to kick life into a dead sparkplug. But with perseverence, the commotion will attract a good samaritan. And this might lead to an offer to boost the battery or de-ice the carburetor.

Obviously, some of the National Commission on Excellence in Education members grew up in the cold country. They've taken the ol' car-starting technique and used it to draw attention to the plight of America's public schools.

The Commission suggests all kinds of ways to improve American education. The suggestions, though, are about as realistic as attempting to start a car by kicking its rear fender. The Commission warns that we're a nation at risk. Well, that's one way of rallying good samaritans. The Commission also laments that schools aren't as good as they used to be. But then, folks who neglect their cars typically believe Detroit doesn't make them like it used to.

The Commission on Excellence isn't going to improve American education. Its job is through. It called our attention to a problem. Now it's up to somebody else to improve schools. And that somebody is first and foremost the school superintendent.

Oh they'll have plenty of help. They certainly can't do it alone. But without their leadership, support, and skills, school improvement will continue to be nothing more than a sought-after goal.

Superintendents interested in spearheading a school improvement effort have to be "can-do" kinds of leaders. They've got to believe that their boards, their staffs, their

teachers, and their communities can accomplish anything they set out to do. Sure, any superintendent can look like a hero with unlimited resources, well-trained staff, and highly motivated students. But most superintendents will tackle the task of school improvement with these three commodities in short supply. No matter. School improvement is still possible. Every school can be better. It all depends on the school superintendent.

Now that's not to say enthusiasm alone is a sufficient requirement. Teachers do have to be well trained. And the students certainly have to be motivated if they're to really benefit from their education. What's needed, besides enthusiasm, is a set of procedures for accomplishing these objectives. And that's why we've published this guide, this "can-do response" to the National Commission on Excellence.

During the past decade the regional laboratories and the research and development centers have spent taxpayers' money looking at all aspects of school improvement. And this publication captures the best of their research and development efforts.

The laboratories and centers, of course, don't believe that the guide alone will be sufficient for the kind of school improvement that most districts desire. But it's an excellent introduction.

The guide contains descriptions of validated research outcomes, as well as helpful hints for successfully implementing them into the normal routine of the district. The book also identifies some popular but goofy research suggestions that should be avoided.

After reading the guide, superintendents ought to consider following-up with the regional laboratories. They're operating a program built around the theme "Effective Schools Are America's Best Bet." Cooperating school districts can get hands-on assistance from the laboratories by becoming involved with this national effort. More details are enclosed in the appendix.

We hasten to add that the "Best Bet" program is also sponsored by the National Association of State Boards of Education and the American Association of School Administrators. The National Education Association has also worked with us to bring it to their state associations.

The school administrators' group was also instrumental in helping convince us to prepare the "Superintendent's Guide." Joseph Scherer, director of AASA's governmental relations program, originally bought and distributed a large number of an earlier "Best Bet" booklet we published on educational technology. The sales from that volume, *The*

Educator's Unauthorized Microcomputer Survival Manual, underwrote the costs of producing this latest effort. Then, when he learned of our interest in doing a response to the National Commission's work, Dr. Scherer worked with us to ensure that we had some grasp of the issues facing school administrators.

The "Can-Do Guide" was published by the Council for Educational Development and Research, a nonprofit educational association supported entirely through the dues from its member institutions. No federal funds were used to produce the book. Marcella R. Dianda, deputy director of the Council, authored the book. She also wrote the CEDaR-published *The Educator's Unauthorized Microcomputer Survival Manual.* Her grasp of the research on school improvement complements her recognition of the demands facing educators at the district level. It's our hope that her latest book will be of assistance to those most responsible for ensuring the effectiveness of our schools.

E. JOSEPH SCHNEIDER
Executive Director
Council for Educational Development and Research

Acknowledgments

This guide reflects the contributions of many people within the network of research and development organizations that constitute the Council for Educational Development and Research (CEDaR). I would like to express my sincere appreciation for their support and advice, and for their reviews of the guide.

The person most instrumental in the guide's production was E. Joseph Schneider, CEDaR's executive director, who originated the idea of writing a superintendents' can-do school improvement guide. Without the leadership and assistance he provided, the guide would never have been written. I am indebted to him for his many suggestions and creative ideas concerning format, content, and style.

The guide was strengthened by reviews and suggestions from staff at the CEDaR-member institutions. Foremost among these were comments offered by Richard Schutz, executive director, SWRL Educational Research and Development. He provided an extensive and thoughtful review of drafts of the guide. Robert Mattson, director, Center for Educational Policy and Management, provided an excellent review of an early draft. David Crandall, executive director, The NETWORK, Inc.; Glen Harvey, director, Planning and Policy Development, The NETWORK, Inc.; and Robert Blum, director, Goal-Based Education Program, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, gave the final version of the guide a careful reading.

The guide benefited from still other contributions from Joyce Epstein, director, School Organization Program, Center for Social Organization of Schools; Edward Gotts, director, Childhood and Parenting Division, Appalachia Educational Laboratory; and David Williams, director, Division of Family, School and Community Studies, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. In addition, Audrey Champagne, senior scientist, Learning Research and Development Center, played a critical role in conceptualizing the guide and in soliciting input from her col-

leagues, William Cooley, William Bickel, and Gaea Leinhardt.

Finally, I would like to thank Joseph Scherer, director, government relations at the American Association of School Administrators for his enthusiastic and continued support of The *Can-Do Guide*.

Chapter One

Educational Reform Stampede Bypasses Superintendents

All of a sudden, school reform and improvement are back in vogue. Quality is the new buzzword . . . excellence is the nation's goal. Raise standards. Increase academic workloads. Lengthen the school day. Extend the school year. Hire better teachers. Assign more homework. And push academic skills . . . particularly computer literacy.

Leading the bandwagon are Secretary of Education T. H. Bell and his National Commission on Excellence. Secretary Bell initially pushed the Commission's report, *A Nation At Risk,* into the national limelight. A favorable plug from President Reagan didn't hurt, either. Bell has kept attention focused on the Commission's recommendations by hosting regional meetings and a "national forum" on educational excellence.

The report itself has been a best seller. The Government Printing Office says it sold more than 100,000 copies. Another 400,000 copies were printed privately. And an estimated four million readers have had access to versions of the report carried in newspapers and national magazines, to say nothing of the education trade press.[1]

Putting the National Commission's Report Into Perspective

Given the report's acceptance, Secretary Bell can hardly be faulted for puffing up his chest and declaring *A Nation At Risk* as a possible "turning point" in our attitudes toward public education. With all due respect, we remain skeptical. Frankly, the breadth and substance, as well as the assumptions, underlying *A Nation At Risk* lead us to question whether the report's recommendations have the potential, as the Secretary claims, for improving our educational system. We agree with a critical review of the report that said: "Blind acceptance of these recommendations could lead to little improvement. Worse yet, a rapid adoption in the hopes of speedy improvement could lead to a disenchantment with reform."[2]

We also worry—rhetoric aside—that the report's recommendations focus on educational quality, but essentially ignore the issue of educational equality.[3]

Finally, *A Nation At Risk* is seriously compromised by its inaccuracies and misinterpretations. Consequently, educators should think twice before instituting the Commission's recommendations. Many, frankly, are grounded on faulty information, weak arguments, and poor data.

In fact, the Commission's report is neither carefully reasoned nor well researched. It is a short, readable, political document.[4] It focuses public attention on what its authors purport to be a crisis. Consequently, it jars readers into action. But some of its proposals are quick-fix, shortsighted, and dead wrong. Superintendents have a long history of exposure to fuzzy reports emerging from academia and Washington. There's little risk, in other words, in the report misleading them. Unfortunately, the report may trigger simplistic, misguided mandates from state and local boards, citizen groups, and concerned legislators.

The Pressure To Reform

The National Commission's report touches a national nerve. In the wake of its release, state boards and legislators clamored for a place in the reform parade. Across the land, they are mandating more of everything, including graduation requirements and school days. Governors, likewise sniffing the political winds, are busily promoting state-wide school improvement programs of every shape and variety. Not one of the 50 states has escaped this school reform mania.[5]

These efforts are reinforced by federal rhetoric (not federal dollars). Secretary Bell, of course, is out in front. For example, he recently listed five "nationwide goals," inspired by the National Commission, which all schools should implement over the next five years.

By 1989, the Secretary suggests, schools should require all graduates to study English for four years, study math, science and social studies for three years, and pass examinations in these areas; ensure that the high school graduating class surpasses the Scholastic Aptitude Test/ American College Testing Program scores attained by the class of 1965; decrease the high school dropout rate to below 10 percent; make teaching so attractive that entry-level salaries are competitive with business and engineering; and establish career ladders for experienced teachers to bring the highest teacher salaries within 5 percent of school administrator salaries.[6]

Superintendents, consequently, are under increasing

pressure to appear responsive. Few can adopt a "wait and see" attitude. The movement is toward reform, regardless of how it's defined. Superintendents must innovate, change, and improve, or at least go through the motions. And woe be the superintendent caught ignoring this national mandate. Well, we suggest it's high time for superintendents to adopt a "can-do" response to the calls for education reform. Let's put the superintendents out in front of this movement where they can lead even as they're being swept along.

It's Up to the Superintendent

First, though, superintendents need to sharpen their survival skills. They must become astute interpreters of reform mandates and recommendations. They must focus their districts' efforts on those reforms that actually lead to improvements. And, they'll have to learn to spot the so-called "reforms" that serve only to steer dollars and energy away from the real task before them.

Many superintendents went through the post-Sputnik reforms of the 1960's. Those that did probably view the latest wave of educational reform with a healthy dose of skepticism.

Well, our publication is written for these reform-jaded pros who, in spite of everything, still want to promote excellence in their schools. In short, our *Can-Do Guide* attempts to make sense out of the national debate on educational reform and to offer educators genuinely interested in improving schools some research-grounded suggestions for accomplishing such a heady task.

The *Can-Do Guide* begins with a brief overview of other education reports in Chapter 2. Some of the reports deserve to be read. Most don't. We'll suggest which reports seem most useful for superintendents interested in school improvement.

Chapter 3 puts some of the National Commission's school reform myths into perspective. Next we look at often-cited solutions to education problems that really are less than they seem.

Finally, we discuss those things that must occur in a school district if improvement is to really occur.

Our publication doesn't suggest that school improvement is easy. We don't promise quick solutions because none exist. But we do provide superintendents with a procedure for getting school improvement up and rolling. And we identify those changes having the greatest potential for improving schools. That's all good school superintendents generally need. They can handle the rest.

Chapter Two

Sorting Out the Reform Reports

Superintendents interested in educational reform certainly do not lack for reading material. No fewer than nine major reports on education, including one by the National Commission on Excellence, flooded the mails in 1983. We'll focus on the National Commission's report because, frankly, it has the notoriety. But we'll also visit the others. We don't summarize each of the reports, though. Lots of people and associations have already done this painstaking task.

A few of the reports warrant careful reading. They are the ones that provide thoughtful analyses of schools' problems and offer insightful suggestions for improvement. Other reports can be ignored completely or at the very most, passed on to the district's library.

The national reports everyone is talking about are:

Action for Excellence: A Comprehensive Plan To Improve Our Nation's Schools, Task Force on Education for Economic Growth, Education Commission of the States; May 1983.

Making the Grade, Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy; May 1983.

A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, The National Commission on Excellence in Education; April 1983.

Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need to Know and Be Able To Do, Educational Equality Project, The College Board; May 1983.

The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto, Mortimer J. Adler on behalf of the members of the Paideia Group; September 1982.

High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America, Ernest L. Boyer, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching; September 1983.

A Place Called School: Prospects for the Future, John I. Goodlad; September 1983.

The Troubled Crusade: American Education 1945-1980, Diane Ravitch, 1983.

A Study of High Schools, Theodore Sizer, Co-sponsored by the National Association of Secondary

School Principals and the National Association of Independent Schools; to be published in 1984.

No surprises on this list, with the possible exception of the educational history by Diane Ravitch and Theodore Sizer's high school study which will be released this year. We'll explain why we included them later.

Most Won't Help Improve Schools

Some people will read and quote extensively from each and every report on our list. They're also likely to share their insights at numerous meetings and conferences. Thank goodness for people who enjoy dissecting reports and pondering their implications. They provide a service to everyone else who doesn't have the time or inclination to struggle through these volumes.

While such academic pursuits are admirable, superintendents generally don't have either the time or luxury to digest one, let alone 10, such reports. And that may be just as well. In fact, superintendents can easily ignore some of the reports and still develop a sense of what's being suggested in this reform movement.

A smaller ought-to-read reading list should contain reports that get to the heart of the matter. These contain observations, suggestions, and ideas that make a difference in how a school performs. In many cases, they reinforce superintendents' own good judgment. And in others, they trigger a superintendent's own creativity.

The Political Reports

Okay, let's pare down the reading list. Our first inclination is to say, scratch off the first three reports in our list. These don't even talk to local educators. Their audience is state and federal policy-makers and politicians.

All these reports have one thing in common. They are, first and foremost, political documents. They paint vivid — not always valid — pictures of the crisis in American education. Obviously, they attempt to scare their readers into action. Looking for school improvement guidance in these three reports is a waste of time. They simply do not provide any.

But can superintendents avoid these reports altogether? Probably not. Staff, parents, and board members will expect superintendents to read them or summaries highlighting their major recommendations.[1] So, we suggest superintendents become familiar with the political reports. But read them for what they are — documents that won't tell districts how to go about school improvement.

The Specialty Reports

Moving down our list, we reach two "specialty reports." They may interest some superintendents, but their scope and orientation are limited.

The first report is the College Board's *Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need To Know and Be Able To Do.* This short report synthesizes the judgment of several hundred school teachers and college faculty about the skills and knowledge students should bring from high school to college. It sets out a rigorous course of study for college-bound students in English, the arts, math, science, social studies, and foreign languages. And it proposes sets of competencies students should master in reading, writing, speaking, listening, math, reasoning, and studying skills.

Critics have suggested the report's recommendations are far fetched and idealistic. It's unrealistic, they say, to expect schools to teach the basic academic subjects as the College Board outlines them when schools are behind in teaching even minimum competencies. But the real plus to this report is that it discusses subject areas and basic skills, thereby providing a comprehensive picture of the curriculum. Sure, the College Board visision of what the students need to know and do is idealistic, but it might challenge districts to think about their curriculum.

The second report is *The Paideia Proposal* by Mortimer Adler. We've labelled it a specialty report because it is primarily a philosophical discussion of what schools should teach and how they should be organized. Superintendents longing for a discussion of educational problems and reforms on this abstract plane will enjoy this short, well-written volume. It calls for a dramatic revision of the high school curriculum with greater attention to academic substance and rigor. Although its suggestions are provocative, the report will disappoint superintendents looking for a nuts-and-bolts discussion of ways to reform schools.

Three for Your Bookshelf

We suggest spending time with three books on our list. All are written by prominent educators. All are written for educators. And all provide superintendents with information and insights they can use in school improvement. One book focuses exclusively on high schools, another discusses elementary and secondary schools, and the third puts educational reform in a historical context. All three are comprehensive studies that greatly increase our understanding of schools, a first step toward thoughtful solutions to education problems.

High School

Superintendents, particularly those interested in secondary education reform, should put *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America,* by Ernest Boyer, on top of their reading list. Boyer is president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Education and former U.S. Commissioner of Education.

Superintendents might want to read this book just for sheer reading pleasure. It is extremely well written. More than that, it is a sensitive account of schools' problems and successes. Boyer's book shows he is not just another remote task-force member pointing out educators' failures and offering advice, from on high, about how they can improve themselves.[2] The report is filled with rich vignettes about actual high schools based on intensive site visits. And nearly every one of the 12 school improvement recommendations Boyer offers has been tried and proven workable, at one or more high schools.

Boyer discusses in detail the following key strategies for promoting educational quality: clear goals; the mastery of language; a core of common learning; preparation for work and further education; school and community service; better teachers; improved instruction; effective use of technology; flexible school patterns; strong leadership; connections with colleges and corporations; and a renewed public commitment to schools.

All in all, Boyer gives American high schools a mixed report card. Nevertheless, he views the future optimistically in light of cited improvements already beginning to take hold.

A Place Called School

John Goodlad, former dean of the UCLA Graduate School of Education, authored *A Place Called School.* It offers insights into elementary and secondary education that superintendents should not miss. The book is well worth superintendents' time, although getting through this hard-to-read volume is a struggle.

Like Boyer, Goodlad's volume results from a study of schools. In this case, researchers talked to teachers, parents and students, and observed classrooms in a diverse sample of 38 elementary and secondary schools.

Goodlad paints a drab picture. He tells us that students spend most of their time listening to teacher lectures and learning facts rather than using higher level thinking skills. And although schools claim to educate broadly, in practice they emphasize a narrow, three R's-based curriculum. Students are taught in large groups, in a relatively standard-

ized way, using textbooks, workbooks, and dittoes. The norm is an unexciting curriculum, taught by unexcited teachers, in drab schools. Teachers do not work together to solve problems pertaining to their own schools. Nor do they have opportunities for instructional collaboration given the demands on their time and the abysmal state of inservice and staff development opportunities.

Goodlad offers two sets of reforms. The first is designed to improve the schools we have; the second includes far-reaching suggestions to create more responsive, innovative, and exciting schools than we currently have. He looks at all aspects of schooling in proposing reforms — the curriculum; school-community relations; the quality of teaching; time spent by students on learning activities; school organization; communication; decision-making; leadership; methods of instruction; and controls and restraints under which schools operate.

The Troubled Crusade

Diane Ravitch is a historian on the faculty of Teachers' College, Columbia University. Her book, *The Troubled Crusade*, may seem a strange addition to our list. In fact, in contrast to the other reports, it does not include one specific school-reform remedy. But it's the one best resource that explains the condition of American education. And it seems to us that anyone interested in reforming schools can profit from a look at the past.

The "troubled crusade" Ravitch documents is American education's attempts at reform over the last 35 years. She describes how and why reforms failed. And she documents the victories. *The Troubled Crusade* looks at the post-Sputnik reforms; the racial revolution in schools; the courts; bilingual education; affirmative action; and the campus unrest of the 1960's. In short, it traces the impact on school of nearly every major change, conflict, and fad since 1945.

We particularly like this history because it reminds us to beware of so-called educational reforms. Many have been tried. Most failed, or were neglected, or were passed over for yet another reform.

Finally, this book provides confirmation that some reforms actually did work. Ravitch concludes the crusade has been a troubled one, but it has helped promote educational quality and equality. Undoubtedly, superintendents will hear a lot more about this book in the coming year.

Another study for which superintendents might keep their eye peeled is a joint venture of the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National Asso-

ciation of Independent Schools. Results will be reported in three volumes over the next few years.[3]

If a recent article by study director, Theodore Sizer, is any indication, superintendents might want to look at the study's three volumes as they are released. Sizer says secondary education reforms have failed in the past because they have not called for major changes in the way high schools are structured. Consequently, his recommendations include calls for a shorter, simpler, and better-defined list of goals; an end to age-grading so students can proceed at their own pace through the curriculum; restructuring of the curriculum so it focuses on fundamental thinking skills which cut across subject areas; and procedures that provide teachers with control over their own and their students' schedules and programs.[4]

In the final analysis, then, we recommend that busy superintendents read three long books rather than three short national education reports. Superintendents will find ideas and recommendations they can use in their improvement efforts in these books. But before they run off to the bookstore, they should turn to our next chapter to begin the business of developing a "can-do" response to calls for educational reform.

Chapter Three

Be Wary of School Reform Myths

Before superintendents buy the school reforms being bandied about, we suggest they examine the solutions closely. Frankly, some of the reforms are actually myths. They perpetuate a false impression of what is wrong with American education and what is needed to improve our schools.

Perhaps no single group has done more to perpetuate school reform myths than the National Commission on Excellence. This chapter focuses on four myths that permeate the Commission's best selling report: "America is a nation at risk," "America has a high-technology future," "states can finance educational reform," and "more is better."

"America Is a Nation at Risk"

We're at risk, says the Commission, because international competitors are overtaking our once unchallenged lead in commerce, industry, science, and technology. And a declining educational system compounds and perpetuates the sorry state of affairs in which we find ourselves. At best, our schools are "mediocre," reports the Commission. That mediocrity threatens not only the future of public education, but "our very future as a Nation and a people."[1]

That's a strong indictment of schools. But is it justified? Are we really at risk educationally? Are our schools in the dire straits the Commission portrays? No, absolutely not. The risk is greatly exaggerated. Moreover, the Commission misrepresents some of the current problems. And it ignores much of what is right with American schools.

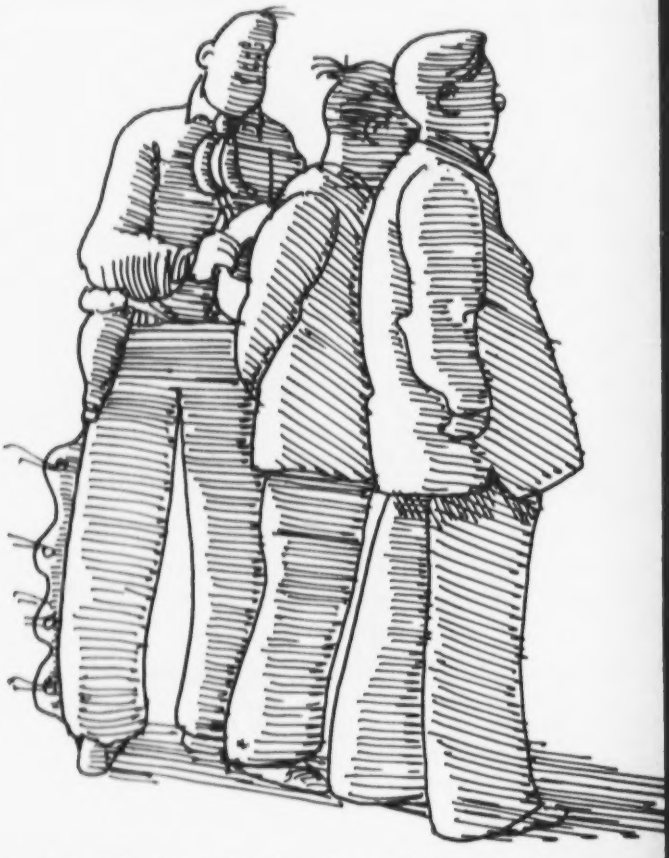
By the way, technical critiques, which look at the indicators the Commission's report uses to draw its conclusions, are available.[2] Skeptical superintendents might want to look at such a review.

The Commission lists a number of indicators of educational risk in its report. These include three we'll examine here: falling SAT scores, declining achievement, and American students' poor academic performance in comparison with students in other countries.

Falling SAT Scores

The National Commission cites a drop in SAT scores over the past 20 years as an indicator of risk. In fact, the scores did decline. But a closer look at why the decline occurred suggests some of the causes are out of the schools' control. The drop, in other words, hardly reflects schools' slip into "mediocrity."

For example, the population taking the test changed fairly dramatically during the 20-year period. Today, a greater cross-section of students take the test. The College Entrance Examination Board, in fact, reports that two-thirds to three-fourths of the SAT score decline between 1964 and



1973 can be attributed to the changing social composition of test takers. From 1973 on other factors have played an increasingly important role. Factors contributing to score decline include matters beyond the schools' direct control — student unrest, lowered textbook standards, changes in family structure, and increased television viewing.[3]

The National Commission fails to mention that SAT scores began to level off in 1981 and made a recovery in 1982. These levels were matched in 1983. A matter of continuing concern is that the number and percentage of very

high test scores have declined over the last two decades, a fact cited by the Commission.[4]

Finally, the National Commission does not mention the

SAT's commonly recognized drawbacks as an indicator of school achievement. First, the test is an aptitude test. It is not directly linked to what schools teach. Consequently, it is not a reliable report on the achievement of the nation's schools. Nor is it helpful in predicting which students will succeed in college. In fact, few colleges and universities use the SAT as the major criterion for selecting students. Predictions are that it will probably become even less important in the future.[5]

Declining Achievement

In building its case that the nation is at risk given schools' and students' poor performance, the National Commission cites several achievement problems. Many high school seniors cannot draw inferences from written materials, or write a persuasive essay, or solve a math problem requiring several steps. Science achievement has declined as well.

We think student performance in these and other areas should be higher. The National Commission, however, exaggerates the decline. In science, for example, results from the National Assessment for Educational Progress show only small achievement declines over the last decade.[6]

In math and writing, the story is the same. Declines were small. And there is some heartening news. High school students' computation performance has increased, for example.[7]

In reading, 17-year-olds in 1980 were doing about as well in their total reading achievement as they were doing a decade earlier. The ability to locate and use sources of information (i.e., reference skills) improved, while inferential comprehension dropped only slightly. Finally, while teenagers tended to hold their own in reading, elementary students' reading performance actually improved, something that bodes well for high school scores in the future.[8]

Granted, these test results give us little reason to cheer, but nothing in these data suggests the conclusion that educational institutions have deteriorated badly.[9]

International Comparisons

The National Commission argues that Western European countries and Japan are doing a better job of educating students than the United States. This contributes to these countries' growing ability to challenge America's supremacy in the world economy.

To support its conclusion, the Commission cites international comparisons it admits were completed over a decade ago.[10] In these comparisons, American students never ranked first or second. Frequently, they ranked last. Consequently, the Commission implores our schools to model themselves after their Western European and Japanese counterparts. Beef up courses and spend more time on academics, particularly on math and science, urges the Commission.

Beware of international comparisons. First, the information cited by the Commission is 10 years old and a lot can change in a decade. More significantly, the comparisons are based on average achievement of American high school students and average high school achievement in

other countries. That may sound reasonable, but it is not. In most other countries, only a small, select group of students continue on to high school. Call them the cream of the crop. In this country, on the other hand, high schools attempt to meet the educational needs of all students. When we compare our best with a comparable group of students from other countries, our students hold their own. In fact, comparisons of reading comprehension across 14 countries show that the top 9 percent of American students did better than the top 9 percent of students in each of the other countries.[11]

So, take heart at the good news about our students' performance and keep the bad news in perspective. Largely unfounded alarms about achievement do not help educators make needed improvements.

Suggesting students' need to improve their "higher-order" skills is more helpful. It says we need to think seriously about ways to improve instruction and sequencing content. And other problems cited by the Commission, such as high illiteracy, tell us we need to focus our efforts on specific groups — the poor, minorities, and urban school children. Illiteracy may be a problem of national proportions, but we know where we need to target solutions.

As a nation, we need to make improvements. But we are hardly a nation at risk.

"America Has a High-Technology Future"

An especially powerful school reform myth claims that America is moving toward a computer-based, high-technology society. And students, therefore, will need advanced math, science, and computer skills to get and hold jobs. Schools, the myth suggests, must improve their efforts in these areas to prepare students for the future.

The National Commission blindly accepts this myth. Produce highly skilled students who can meet the technical demands of tomorrow's world, the Commission warns, or prepare for our national demise. Push math and science studies. Require each high school student to take at least one-half year of computer science prior to graduation. That's the way to prepare for a "high-tech" future, right?

Not necessarily. Superintendents can find good reasons to beef up their computer, science, and math courses but a "high-tech" job is not one of them.

Little evidence supports the contention we are being transformed into a high-technology, information-age so-

ciety. More specifically, although the use of high-technology will certainly increase, most of the economy will look the same in 1995 as it does now.[12]

In contrast to the picture painted by *A Nation at Risk*, researchers offer this summary of America's "high-tech" future: "Most future jobs will be low-skilled or middle-skilled positions, many existing jobs will disappear, and the existing jobs that survive will require lower levels of skill than they do now. And as technological advances continue, the required job skills will decrease further."[13]

Bureau of Labor Statistics back up this view of the future.[14] According to the Bureau, most new jobs created in the next decade will not be engineering or computer dependent jobs. Instead, they will be concentrated in clerical and retail positions. The fastest growing jobs, for example, will be nurses' aides, waiters and waitresses, sales clerks, and janitors.

Of the 20 occupations expected to generate the most new jobs by 1990, not one is related to high-tech. Such jobs — computer programmers, operators, and systems analysts — will account for less than 10 percent of new jobs in this decade.

As important, the application of electronic technology to existing jobs will not require workers to upgrade their skills. That is, computer users 20 years ago needed a working knowledge of computer programming and computer languages, and more than a smattering of math. But today's computers are "user friendly." With little training, most people can operate today's small business and personal computers. Even many computer-related jobs require little skill other than typing.[14] As computer systems become more and more advanced, people will need even fewer specialized skills to operate the machines.

In spite of all this, it's now fashionable to emphasize the importance of education by ringing the high-tech bell. The National Commission does it as do others. Ironically, this high-tech hype can be advantageous if it focuses attention on education and becomes a force for upgrading the curriculum, teaching staff, and educational quality in general.[16] But that doesn't seem to be the case. Instead, schools are under pressure to offer students courses that will prepare them for high-tech careers. And students worry that unless they develop math, science, and computer programming skills they won't be able to find jobs.

Sure, students should acquire these skills. The point is, other skills are equally important. Superintendents should take a broader view of the skills students will need: mastery of a wealth of information about culture, language, society,

and technology as well as the ability to apply that information and acquire new knowledge.

Certainly schools will teach science and math. They will even teach students how computers work and how to use them for self-instruction, collecting and retrieving information, and word processing. But schools should also teach logic, analytical reasoning, and all types of communication skills. That means emphasizing reading, writing, speaking, and listening; interpreting written and spoken material; and developing a proficiency in at least one language besides English.[17]

Computers should help teach logic or assist in learning academic subjects. In the final analysis, however, the computer is a tool for learning. It certainly should not displace more fundamental instruction in schools.[18]

States Should Finance Educational Reform

The Reagan Administration has made it plain that the federal government has no intention of footing the costs of implementing the National Commission on Excellence's recommendations. That bill, according to the National Education Association, is in the neighborhood of $23.1 billion.[19] Others say it could run closer to $30 billion or that Commission recommendations to lengthen the school day and school year could cost at least an extra $40 billion.[20] Even seemingly simple reforms, such as decreasing class size by one student, can cost millions.

Ignoring the substantial cost of the educational reform measures it insists upon, the Reagan Administration places responsibility for financing school improvement in the laps of states and districts. The National Commission counsels, "State and local officials should . . . incorporate reforms we propose in their educational policies and fiscal planning."[21] Secretary Bell suggests governors should press first for reforms that do not cost money.[22] And President Reagan staunchly maintains schools need more discipline, not more money.[23]

Obviously, states and local districts will have to come up with the dollars to finance their educational reform efforts. And the Reagan Administration is literally banking on the states' ability to do just that. The assumption is that, if the economy continues to improve, new dollars should be available from the natural growth in state tax revenues.

For some states and districts financing educational reform won't be a problem. California, for example, has the funds to finance reform. And even states that suffered economic setbacks in the recession, such as Michigan, are

finding money for school reform. But other states and districts where federal support has been substantial and state funds more limited, will be hard pressed to finance educational reform.[24]

In every state, education must compete on the state level with demands for prisons, bridges and roads, and sewer systems. And, although funds for education might increase, there is no guarantee these dollars will be used to support school improvement programs. The excellence movement also bumps up against pressing educational demands, including the deteriorating condition of school buildings. For example, a 1983 survey of 100 districts in 34 states showed that nearly three-quarters needed their rooves repaired or replaced. Another quarter needed to repair or replace heating and air conditioning equipment. Twenty percent said they would fail to pass fire and safety inspections. And a little over 10 percent were not meeting building requirements for the handicapped. A similar percentage had not yet removed hazardous asbestos from their buildings. The estimated bill for repairing the nation's schools is a staggering $25 billion.[25]

School reform programs are also squeezed by the schools' need for new laboratory equipment and instructional materials. These problems are particularly severe in urban schools where a recent study found that teachers lacked such basic materials as books and paper.[26]

Groups such as the Twentieth Century Fund recommend that the federal government pay at least a portion of the dollars required for educational reform to equalize the disparity between rich and poor districts.[27] Obviously, districts with the most severe educational problems are at an enormous disadvantage if they are forced to go it alone or to compete for limited state reform funds.

Certainly, some school improvement and reform strategies are lower in cost than others. For example, compared to calls for merit pay and new school programs, many of the improvement strategies outlined in this publication are low cost. Some can even be implemented by redirecting existing resources. But we fear that without federal support, educational reform will remain out of reach of some districts and superintendents. Surely some will benefit from state largesse, but others will do school improvement on a shoestring.

"More Is Better"

The "more is better" myth perpetuated by the National Commission comes in two forms: *more* required courses and *more* time for learning through a longer school year

and day. It assumes that keeping students in school longer, and requiring them to take more academic courses, will improve achievement. Both assumptions, however, rest on a faulty foundation.

More Required Courses

With respect to courses, the National Commission is concerned about the watered-down school curriculum. Required courses have decreased, while electives have increased. Students have "migrated from vocational and college preparatory programs to 'general track' programs." More and more students, the National Commission notes, are electing courses from a "curricular smorgasbord . . . appetizers and desserts . . . which are mistaken for main courses." These include home economics, physical education, driver education and other "personal service and development courses."[28]

To remedy these ills, the Commission recommends schools spend more time teaching what it calls "the new basics." All students seeking a diploma should be required to complete four years of English, three years of math, social studies and science, and one-half year of computer science. For the college bound, the National Commission recommends two years of a foreign language.[29]

Actually, many states and districts have already taken steps to beef up course requirements. Over the past three years, more than half of our 16,000 school districts increased the number of credits they require in such core subjects as English, science, and math; 38 percent will upgrade their standards by 1985.[30] According to the Education Commission of the States, about 20 states have tightened graduation requirements since 1980, most often in science and math. Another 20 have such proposals under consideration.[31]

Now the "back to the basics, again" routine sounds like a common-sense approach. However, requiring more courses, particularly in high school, is not sufficient to guarantee improved performance. Yes, students clearly need continued practice and instruction in basic content areas to master important skills, but it is naive and perhaps even dangerous to assume this can be accomplished by simply increasing course requirements.

Better performance will only come about as a result of a coherent, cumulative pattern of learning. This means, among other things, that districts need to coordinate courses and skills within and across grade levels. And schools need to counsel students to select an individual program of study in which courses logically build on one another.

Finally, as schools think about increasing required courses, educators should shift from focusing on *what* they are teaching to *how* they are teaching. Excellence probably will not result from prescribing more of the kind of pedagogy that exists in some schools. Right now all too many classrooms are bland and neutral places dominated by teacher talk. Students answer written questions and take a great many tests. Discussion, written and oral reports, debates, simulations, and role playing — in short creative forms of learning — are rare. Equally disturbing, the principles of good teaching, such as telling students what is expected of them and letting them know how well they are doing, are often missing.[32] The proper focus for educational improvement should be on instructional quality, not on more courses.

More Time

To teach more content, the National Commission recommends increasing time for instruction and learning. It urges school districts and state legislatures to consider seven-hour school days and a 200- to 220-day school year. In addition, it wants to see time available for learning expanded through better classroom management and organization of the school day. Finally, the Commission recommends that schools find additional instructional time to meet the needs of slow learners, the gifted, and others who need more instructional diversity than can be accommodated in the conventional school day and year.[33]

Recommendations to increase students' learning time offered by the National Commission are based on three lines of reasoning. First, it seems reasonable that students who spend more time learning will learn more. Second, educational research supposedly has found an impressive link between time spent learning and student achievement. Finally, the National Commission emphasizes that many other industrialized countries (e.g., West Germany, Japan) have much longer school days and school years than the United States. This, then, contributes to their ability to produce better educated students, according to the Commission.[34]

As compelling as the logic and evidence may seem, increasing learning time is neither straightforward nor singularly effective in improving achievement.[35] And the Commission's recommendations to increase the length of the school day and the school year raise particular concern. Merely increasing the time students spend on a particular subject, or the time they spend in school during the day or year, doesn't necessarily improve student achievement.

With the exception of one study, no researcher has reported effects strong enough to suggest that time increases, in and of themselves, improve student achievement or justify the additional costs involved.[36] This includes, by the way, studies conducted by the International Assessment of Educational Achievement (IAEA), the only systematic international study of education. Although many Western European nations and Japan have longer school days and school years than the United States, these time differences simply don't explain achievement variations from country to country. Cultural differences and differences in the countries' educational systems have more powerful effects on achievement than time spent in school.[37]

Generally, researchers switch the emphasis away from the quantity of time spent to its quality. As Ernest Boyer concludes in *High School*, "The urgent need is not lengthening the school day or school year, but using more efficiently the time schools already have — more time to complete a science laboratory experiment, more time to write essays and critique them, and more time to engage in extended foreign language conversation. . . . The urgent need is not more time, but better use of time."[38]

Before school districts lengthen the school day or school year, superintendents should review how time is currently spent. In this way, they may be able to improve time use and thereby gain more instructional time, and avoid the expense associated with adding hours to the school day and days to the school year. Superintendents might well ask themselves if they couldn't find a better way to spend this money. For example, a district could use these dollars to attract more talented teachers, retrain the current teaching staff, reduce class size, or hire more remedial specialists. These alternative strategies would be more effective in the long run.[39]

Another alternative to increasing time for students is increasing time for teachers to meet and work together. Some researchers suggest this is a more promising way to use additional hours and days.

We'll come back to the whole time issue in later sections of this guide. "Providing Time for Excellence" focuses on making additional time for teachers and using available time as efficiently as possible. And Chapter 4 includes strategies for developing a can-do response to calls for increasing student's time-on-task.

Chapter Four

School Improvement Traps To Avoid

School reform can be hazardous to a superintendent's mental health and continued employment. The path to reform is full of pitfalls. What often looks like a reasonable improvement strategy is frequently nothing more than a mirage. Consequently, in this chapter, we discuss four common school improvement traps to avoid: "The 'effective school' recipe," "the 'great principal' theory," "the computer cure-all," and "the time-on-task fallacy." Each is particularly hazardous if it is treated as *the* way to improve schools in isolation from other strategies.

The "Effective School" Recipe

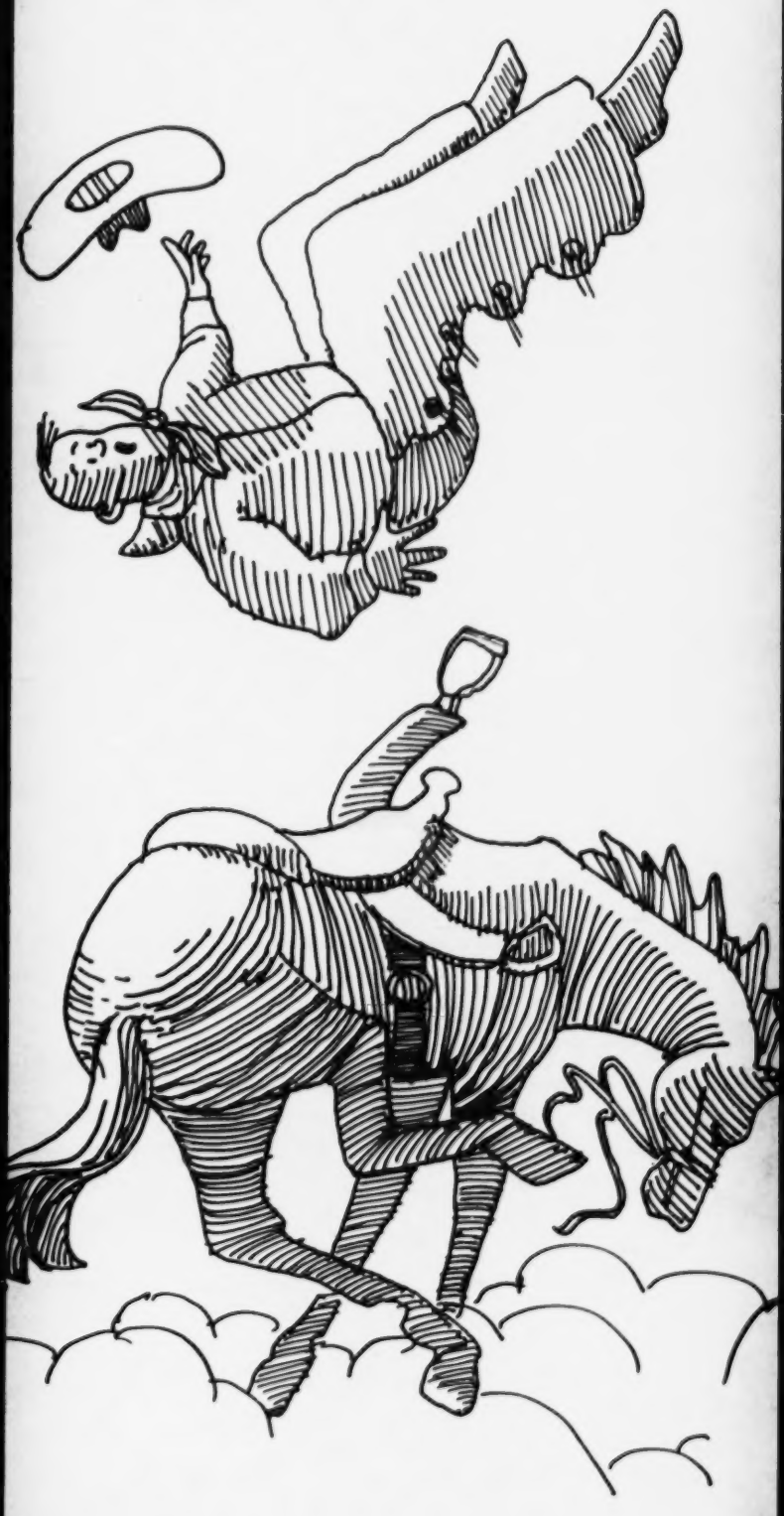
Over the past decade, researchers have labored to identify unusually effective or successful schools. The results have grabbed headlines in education magazines and professional publications. Generally speaking, these studies are useful to superintendents interested in school improvement. But they should be read with a jaundiced eye. At best, the school effectiveness research is a broad improvement framework. At worst, it is a bad improvement recipe.[1]

A Closer Look at Effective Schools

The effective schools identified in research studies produce high student achievement, particularly among disadvantaged and minority students. By comparing these schools with their less successful counterparts, researchers have identified instructional approaches, learning environments, and staff behaviors related to improved student achievement.

Although studies vary in their definitions of effectiveness, we pass along qualifications to look for in labelling a school effective:[2]

- Effective schools produce high achievement on broad and important academic skills, and not just on narrowly defined skills in one or two subjects.
- Effective schools have a record of high achievement



that persists over time.

- Effective schools demonstrate achievement levels that are consistently high for more than one grade level.
- Effective schools' achievement gains take place across the school, not in just a few classrooms.

Because the results of the school effectiveness studies have been so widely publicized, they are a popular basis for school improvement initiatives. In fact, the Education Commission of the States reports some states have "effective schools programs" built on the research. These are "structured programs with five specific elements": strong administrative leadership; a safe and orderly climate; an emphasis on basic academic skills; high teacher expectations for all students; and a system for monitoring and assessing pupil performance.[3]

This five-element list is only one of many resulting from the effective school studies. Some include additional factors which expand on these. For example, we'd add that effective schools are well-managed institutions that coordinate instruction carefully across classrooms and grade levels. First, they develop instructional goals through schoolwide planning. Then they use these clear and publicly agreed-on goals to select content, objectives, and materials. And they carry this coordination one step further by aligning goals, objectives, content taught, instructional materials, and the testing program. This alignment ensures that students learn what the school intends to teach and that the testing mirrors that instruction.

In addition, effective schools have capable leadership that supports and encourages excellence. The school supports teachers' efforts to improve by providing appropriate staff development activities, discussing problems, and providing feedback and assistance. Schoolwide discipline policies back up teachers. Other policies reward effective teachers and those trying to improve. In addition, the school recognizes that improvement is a long-term process. Therefore, policies protect teachers trying new practices from competing demands on their time and from premature evaluation of their newly acquired skills. And the school encourages collegiality, teaming, and cooperation among teachers as well as their active participation in goal-setting, instructional coordination, problem-solving, and ongoing school improvement.

There Are No Proven School Improvement Recipes

The current school improvement craze pushes schools to

emulate their "effective" counterparts identified in these popularized studies. Those that do not work to acquire these characteristics risk being accused of lacking the will or desire to teach students effectively. The reasoning here is simple. Once superintendents know of a set of variables associated with effectiveness, they can merely adopt them.

However, it's shortsighted to assume that what has positive effects in one setting will invariably have the same effects in another. The effective characteristics described in any listing is unlikely to apply in all schools. They may not work as expected in many cases. And they may even be counterproductive in some schools.[4]

The effective schools studies have limitations as well as strengths. And while the limitations do not invalidate the research findings, they put them into perspective and help districts resist the temptation to use them as school improvement recipes.

We begin with a word about definitions, or lack of a common definition for effectiveness. For example, being an "effective school" means different things to different people. And researchers worry that the definitions do not have enough in common to describe a single concept.

The number of characteristics identified as effective vary from study to study. Some studies identify only five characteristics while others list more than 20. Some lists are similar. Others drop a critical attribute altogether. Put another way, the individual variables that make up the effective schooling framework are not nearly as consistent or as clear as some proponents suggest.

That brings us to a third concern. The research on effective schools focuses on a single dimension of effectiveness — basic skills achievement. But teachers, the board, and even the community probably measure school effectiveness in numerous ways. For some, it's attaining administrative, social, and vocational goals as well as basic skills outcomes. Others want schools to promote other outcomes as well, such as learning to make decisions, developing self-esteem, and acquiring higher level thinking skills (analysis, evaluation, etc.), and an aesthetic sense.[5]

The biggest fault underlying these studies, though, is the fact they offer little guidance for creating effective schools. While they trumpet the good news that effective schools exist, they do not tell us how they got that way. They offer no blueprint of what a teacher, a principal or a superintendent should do to improve achievement. As one reviewer recently asked: "Who knows . . . how to construct a positive, enduring school climate? Exactly what do principals do to shape teacher expectations and instructional practices in

ways that improve students' performance?"[6]

The school effectiveness research also focuses on a particular kind of school. Most studies were done in urban elementary schools. These schools have a high proportion of low-SES students, plus successful reading and/or math programs in the lower grades. These facts should be kept in mind when the urge strikes to apply the studies' findings to secondary schools, other subject areas, or suburban schools, etc. In addition, the studies generally compared unusually effective and ineffective schools. Consequently, because of their design, they only tell us about schools at the extremes and nothing about schools in between.

Finally, these studies emphasize again and again that they are describing correlations and nothing more. For example, they document a link between school effectiveness and leadership by the principal. But they do not say that leadership causes the school to be effective. There is no cause and effect here, only an association between leadership and effectiveness. We can counter the argument that you need to have an effective principal to have an effective school with the suggestion that effectiveness can be attributed to principals precisely because they head effective organizations.[7]

The Effective School's Promise for Superintendents

Profiles of effective schools validate what many administrators and teachers already do to promote educational excellence. There is nothing magical or mysterious here. The route to effectiveness is through a combination of common sense, sound instructional practice, and good administration.

Superintendents embarking on a school improvement program need to pull together strategies that have been found effective in individual classrooms and at the building and district levels. In other words, to do school improvement, superintendents must fill in the gaps between what is described in lists of effective characteristics and what needs to be done for their schools.

As we will emphasize throughout this guide, school improvement is situation specific. What needs to be improved or changed varies from district to district and school to school. And how districts go about the actual process of improving, is also affected by local conditions.

Because school improvement is situation specific, begin with an inventory of the school's unique problems, strengths, and resources. In other words, school reform starts with profiles of individual schools and students' per-

formance in each school. As a group, the profiles provide a picture of strengths and weaknesses across the district. As we discuss in Chapter 6, they are developed by examining indicators that pinpoint areas on which schools need to work. School improvement, then, becomes a process of working on these specific areas rather than just emulating characteristics of effective schools identified in studies.

The Computer Cure-all

Every positive adjective except "panacea" has been used to describe the impact computers will make on education. It has enormous potential as a learning tool, say computer enthusiasts. And unlike teaching machines or instructional television, or any host of innovations that have come and gone in education, computers are here to stay.

Beyond a doubt, superintendents are being bombarded by the virtues of computers, particularly micro or personal computers. The times demand it. Computers permeate our culture. Schools must not only improve but they must include computer "literacy" and programming courses in the curriculum.

As the cost of microcomputer systems keeps coming down, their use in instruction becomes more feasible. So right or wrong, well-advised or not, more and more schools are joining the computer revolution. In fact, as of January 1983 the majority (53%) of American schools had one microcomputer in use. That breaks down to 85 percent of all high schools, 77 percent of all junior-senior combinations, 68 percent of all middle- and junior-high schools, and 42 percent of all elementary schools. And about two-fifths of all secondary schools have five or more microcomputers.[8]

Frankly, this proliferation of microcomputers and the claims about their potential ought to make superintendents anxious. Computer technology can easily be a school improvement trap. Computer technology is neither all good nor all bad for schools. There are disadvantages as well as advantages, and the chances of becoming a master of technology are just as great as the chances of becoming a victim of technology.

Superintendents wary of computers as a cure-all may be interested in a short, easy-to-read book titled *The Educator's Unauthorized Microcomputer Survival Manual.*[9] The publication is particularly pertinent in the current school reform climate.

The manual discusses the pros and cons of technology and offers some strategies superintendents can use not only to survive the computer revolution, but to turn it to their advantage. The survival skills it mentions are nothing

more than skills superintendents, school administrators, and teachers already possess . . . topped off with some consumer skills. The manual urges educators to:

- Figure out exactly how, where, when, and why they will use a microcomputer (or any kind of a computer),
- Become familiar with appropriate questions to ask when judging computer programs and selecting computer hardware, and
- Master some computer technology so they can talk to the "experts."

Deciding How You Will Use Computers

Superintendents thinking about using computers for instruction should spend considerable time deciding how the district can best use these machines before investing in either the hardware or the software. As with most things, planning is critical. At the outset, superintendents should:

- Pull together existing talent and resources within their community, district, and school to guide the planning process,
- Study the district's needs and determine how microcomputer technology might help address them, and
- Seek outside advice and additional information, as needed, to help develop and finalize the plan.

Using Your Educational Expertise To Judge Software

Districts and schools should carefully evaluate computer software prior to purchasing it. Although software is improving, the quality of available packages varies greatly. The district should secure review copies, read published reviews, attend demonstrations, and ask lots of questions. At the very least:

- Evaluate statements of the program's rationale, goals, and objectives,
- Examine the teaching procedures and instruction included in the program,
- Evaluate the knowledge and information presented in the program for completeness, accuracy, and appropriateness for the students who will use the program,
- Determine how easily students can operate the program, how much control they have to pace their learning, and how well they might enjoy working with the program,
- Consider what subject matter teachers need to be experienced in to use the program, teachers' impressions of the program, and the quality of any teacher

materials included with the program,

- Determine if any tests or quizzes included with the program adequately measure what it teaches, and
- Examine information on the program's effectiveness, the developers, and any field testing completed during development.

More detailed information on planning for microcomputers, evaluating software, and purchasing microcomputers is contained in the microcomputer survival manual. It lists more references about computers' administrative and instructional applications in its "Additional Reading" section.

Fortunately, we find educators' enthusiasm about technology tempered with caution and healthy skepticism.[10] The computer can be a learning tool for educators able to make the technology work for them. But it is hardly a cure for our education ills.

The Time-on-Task Fallacy

Like studies of effective schools, findings about the importance of time-on-task have been popularized in education magazines and journals. Time-on-task is also called *academic learning time* or *engaged learning time.* Basically, it is the amount of time students spend paying attention to their studies. Put more scientifically, time-on-task is the amount of time students spend on academic activities at an appropriate level of difficulty for them. Students are on task when they are actively engaged in activities which match their abilities and interests and on which they succeed most of the time.

On the surface, improving achievement by increasing time-on-task appears to make good sense. But an oversimplified view that more time equals more learning can be a school improvement trap.

Pay Offs of More Time-on-Task

A few years ago, the California Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study, probably the most widely known examination of the effects of academic learning time on achievement, spurred considerable interest in the topic. This carefully designed and executed study has been used to argue the case for increasing student achievement through allocating more time to learning and a higher proportion of that time to academic learning time.[11] But researchers believe we may have overreacted to this and subsequent studies. They say that the link between time-on-task and learning is there, but it is small. In fact, "the most outstanding finding . . . is that the effects are as small as they are."[12]

All this means that superintendents seeking to improve

student achievement by increasing time-on-task would need to allocate huge increases in time. According to one analysis, if a district wanted to increase elementary students' reading comprehension from the 50th to the 60th percentile on a standardized achievement test, teachers would have to spend an additional hour each day on reading comprehension.[13] Other studies show that in first-grade classrooms, as much as 130 to 210 minutes of student engaged time in reading or language arts may be needed to show greater-than-expected student achievement gains in these subjects. In fifth-grade, as much as 90 to 135 minutes of engaged time in reading and language arts may be needed.[14] In other words, sizable increases in achievement require sizable increases in amount of time if time is the only variable being modified.

Limitations on More Time

Unfortunately, no handy formulas exist to help a district calculate how much time it should spend teaching certain subjects to raise achievement to specific levels. In fact, it is not even clear how much of the variation in time-on-task from student to student and classroom to classroom can be manipulated. Students differ, for example, in their willingness to stay on task. And teachers differ in their ability to manage time. Teachers can take steps to encourage students to stay on task. And studies show teachers can improve their time use with training. Nevertheless, there are limits to what can be done. Some teaching practices, for example, may use time more efficiently than others, but even with the same techniques, some teachers are simply able to make more efficient use of their time than their colleagues.[15]

At best, time is only one factor in students' learning. The idea that more time will naturally lead to more learning ignores other important factors. The quality of the resources available to the student, for example, is at least equally important. Such resources include the quality of instruction, the learning environment, textbooks, and instructional materials.

Finally, the effort the student exerts to learn is an important factor. As every teacher knows, making more instructional time available to students does not necessarily mean they will use that time for learning. If students do not pay attention, or put much effort into their studies, additional time is wasted.

Effort, resources and time are intertwined, researchers remind us. Increasing time alone may have little effect on achievement unless students are willing and able to learn

with high quality instructional resources, including teachers and materials.

Some factors which affect student engagement in learning, such as students' sex, aptitude, and interest, are difficult or impossible to change. And finally, students' inclination to apply themselves may be determined by factors the school never even considered. For example, the National Commission condemns schools for less demanding academic courseloads and for falling test scores. How-

ever, many high school students find no good reason to prepare for exams or to take demanding courses. After all, neither appears necessary anymore to ensure admittance into college.[16]

Looking At Time Use

In spite of these limitations, and the fact that time-on-task is one small factor in students' learning, it's still one schools can control. And schools certainly differ considerably in how they use time. Some studies, for example, report a seven-fold difference in time allocated to math instruction across classrooms.[17] Other studies find that elementary schools at the upper end of the range of time used allocate substantially more time for math and language arts. And they still find about an hour a day for science and social studies.[18]

Because educators are so busy, they rarely pause to look at how they spend their minutes and hours or how classrooms, schools, or the district makes use of available learning time. Such a review is probably a good idea, particularly if achievement problems exist. Researchers recommend districts review the way time is allocated to

periods of instruction, to various subject areas, and to instructional techniques.

Incidentally, the goal is not necessarily promoting large increases in time-on-task. Researchers report that on an average, somewhere around 70 percent of class time is spent on instruction. Other studies suggest there is a point of diminishing return and more time may actually be detrimental.[19] Perhaps the 70 percent figure documented across studies is a practical and reasonable target.

In the long run, superintendents' common sense will probably save them from the time-on-task school improvement trap. Obviously, students need to spend class time in active learning activities. Classroom periods should be free from interruptions over the public address system, or notes from the counseling office, or disruptions from the hall or school yard. And staff training might well include classroom management techniques to encourage students' attention or time-on-task.

Our view is summarized in this comment: "Certainly what is done in time and how appropriate it is affects the learning that takes place. Focusing on time-on-task provides part of the information needed to understand effective instruction."[20]

The "Great Principal" Notion

Superintendents have heard it again and again: the principal is the key actor in any school improvement effort. Principals are in a pivotal position to facilitate school improvement, particularly when administrative and bureaucratic constraints are minimized. They can provide consistent and continuous leadership, including instructional leadership; set an appropriate tone for the effort; and bring order and purpose to the school as a whole. In addition, they can build a commitment among staff to promote the school improvement program's goals. Finally, they can guide the effort so it attains these goals.

All the research on effective schools points out the principal's importance in promoting excellence. And although the National Commission on Excellence gives principals only passing attention, the other national education reports highlight their role.

Superintendents can only hope their principals will do all the tasks identified by the research studies and suggested by various reports. It would make school improvement a great deal easier. But, not all research studies agree on the principal's ability to lead school improvement efforts. Principals reflect the range of abilities found in any management grouping. Consequently, superintendents

need to put the "great principal" notion into perspective.

The Principal As an Instructional Leader?

Some studies tell us principals in successful schools are "instructional leaders." This notion has taken on a kind of mystique, largely because of the charismatic, exceptional principals some researchers claim to have found in "effective schools." These principals/instructional leaders articulate a schoolwide emphasis on basic skills achievement, set high expectations for teachers and students, and impart a belief that the school and the teachers are responsible for students' learning. But they become intimately involved with instruction as well.[21]

These research studies are for the most part, case studies of inner-city elementary schools. They found that principals in effective schools demonstrate instructional leadership by spending time in classrooms to identify problems and work with teachers to develop strategies for dealing with them. Their efforts can, and frequently do, include suggesting alternative ways to teach content.

In short, as an instructional leader, the principal plays an active role in classroom instruction as both a master teacher and a curriculum expert. He or she knows a lot about the instructional process. More significantly, such principals have the time and inclination to advise teachers.

Despite the ballyhoo surrounding such principals, there are those who look skeptically at the whole notion of a principal serving as an instructional leader. The skeptics point out that it is naive to think principals can acquire and maintain a higher level of teaching expertise than teachers. Let's face it, not all principals were effective teachers.[22]

Expecting principals to supervise classroom instruction also ignores all the non-instructional tasks they perform just to keep their buildings running smoothly. These chores take up the lion's share of the principal's day. Also, studies show teachers may not welcome this kind of hands-on assistance. Many do not expect or want their principals to be so intrusive. Besides, other research studies claim successful schools are places where teachers have considerable instructional autonomy and don't have to worry about a principal butting in on instructional matters.[23]

Research on how principals spend their time suggests they have little time to be instructional leaders. Principals spend more than 65 percent of the workday in face-to-face exchanges with staff, faculty, and students. And they spend an additional 8 percent of their day on the telephone. In a recent survey, principals report program development and personnel as their first and second priorities. However,

they also report spending far more actual time on school management than on either of these priorities.[24]

A Place Called School reports principals often lack major skills and abilities required for educational improvement. For example, they cannot identify problems that would provide leverage for schoolwide improvement, nor can they build the long-term agenda school improvement requires. Instead of being instructional leaders, many are insecure in their relations with teachers and rarely or never visit classrooms. Others are hopelessly bogged down in paperwork. Some even exaggerate the magnitude of the paperwork to avoid areas of work in which they feel less secure. And these were not substandard principals. Many were rated by their superintendents as better than average.[25]

Making Principals Great

If principals are so important to school improvement, how can their leadership be strengthened? Suggestions include improving the ways we prepare and select principals. Some contend that principals can't possibly exercise instructional leadership if they don't have strong classroom experience. Consequently, there are calls for principals' professional training to follow that of teachers. By giving them a firm grounding in instruction, this training would also increase principals' credibility in teachers' eyes.[26]

Another recommendation is to give principals and schools more autonomy and authority. In the past, principals had much more autonomy than they do today. Now they are "administered within an inch of their lives."[27] And their effectiveness is hampered by layers of administration and red tape. Steps to rebuild principals' leadership include giving each school more control over its budget and even providing discretionary money they can use for ongoing school improvement.

Others recommend that district leadership make efforts to identify faculty and staff with leadership potential for principalships. Once identified, districts might provide study leaves to allow these principal candidates to attend carefully planned university and college programs. Such programs might balance academics with one or more internships as assistant principals.[28]

Finally, because many principals learn, on the job, the skills they need, they probably need better inservice opportunities. These would allow them to upgrade and develop new skills, exchange information, and share ideas.

Superintendents, it seems to us, might influence the adoption of these or other strategies to strengthen prin-

cipals' leadership skills. In the meantime, we refer you to Chapter 6's discussion of "Ensuring Building-Level School Improvement Leadership." That chapter discusses what superintendents can reasonably expect from principals in a school improvement effort.

Superintendents who have principals ready, willing, and able to assume an instructional leadership role in school improvement are ahead of the game. But such principals are the exception rather than the rule. And turning a school principal into a school improvement leader is certainly not the only route to improving a school, let alone all the schools in a district.

Chapter Five

School Reform Begins at Home

Superintendents have known for a long time what many national calls for educational improvement sidestep—the central office plays a critical role in school reform. The coordination, leadership, and clout it brings to the effort can make the difference between success and failure.

It All Starts with the Superintendent

Research confirms that ongoing support for the principals, teachers, and other staff involved in any effort at school improvement or change is important to its success.[1] With a little support, teachers and principals can attack their problems. Superintendents, in other words, must provide this support.

Such support is important because a district's reform initiative is actually composed of individual improvement programs carried out in the schools. Put another way, improvement happens on a school-by-school, teacher-by-teacher, and student-by-student basis.[2]

However, individual schools' efforts are enhanced when they carry out their improvement plans within a common framework provided by the central office. Among other things, that framework addresses state reform mandates or recent national calls for education improvement. And it provides a strong underlying philosophy and set of goals which drive the initiative.

Although central direction and requirements are necessary, superintendents need to resist the temptation to issue decrees and to overly specify guidelines to schools. Researchers have proven over and over again that school people, like everyone else, are remarkably resistant to wishful changes suggested by others. More often than not, they simply ignore such mandates. Or they implement guidelines and requirements with different consequences than wishful policy-makers expected. This happened most blatantly with some of the more loosely defined federally-funded "innovations" of the 1970's.[3] But it can also happen

at the local level with more discrete programs and very specific reform mandates.

Instead of merely mandating reform, superintendents should figure out ways to facilitate it. For example, they can assist schools by keeping them relatively unfettered by rules and paperwork. A superintendent can also develop policies that provide school reformers with the resources they need to get the job done.

Superintendents' Can-Do Improvement Strategies

Various activities facilitate school reform.[4] We list several here and expand on them in other sections of the guide:

- Ensure that schools have considerable latitude and autonomy in determining the exact means by which they will improve their performance.
- Minimize staff transfers, if possible. Frequent transfers are destructive and likely to retard, if not prevent, improvement.
- Make sure the curriculum builds on the skills students are expected to acquire. Ensure that students receive sufficient time to learn these skills. And coordinate instruction in these skills across grade levels.
- Ensure that the school has the instructional leadership required to initiate and maintain the improvement process. The principal can play this role, but groups of teachers or other administrators can also provide the necessary leadership.
- Provide schoolwide staff development. Tie staff development to the school's instructional program and base it on the expressed needs of teachers.
- Make a point of publicly honoring academic achievement and stressing its importance through appropriate symbols and ceremonies.
- Ensure that assistance and support for the improvement effort include assessing current practices, setting clear expectations, establishing commitment, allocating resources and materials, problem-solving and trouble-shooting, monitoring improvements, evaluating the improvement program's outcomes, planning for continuation, and securing ongoing commitment and resources for the improvement effort.
- Maximize the time students spend learning academic subjects. Devote a greater portion of the day to these subjects. Increase the time students spend in class in active learning activities. Minimize disruptions during class periods.

- Provide time for teachers to work together. Policies that lengthen the school day or school year, or staffing arrangements which free teachers from some classroom responsibilities, can create additional time for teachers to plan and share ideas.
- Ensure that district-wide testing programs mirror the instructional program and that tests measure students' mastery of the curriculum.
- Encourage schools to go through a step-by-step process in developing their improvement programs.
- Pull together specialists (e.g., in data analysis, curriculum, evaluation, and staff development) from within and outside the district to assist school staff.
- Provide support for individuals involved in the improvement program. Mechanisms available to the superintendent include peer-support systems, professional development opportunities to sharpen skills needed for the improvement program, and incentive-reinforcement systems (including public praise, choice of schedule, choice of students, stipends for inservice presentations and summer work designing programs, and freedom from routine chores such as hallway or playground duty).
- Provide support for the improvement initiative from existing programs. These include programs already in place to improve students' performance in a subject area, such as reading, or the performance of a particular group of students, such as disadvantaged or limited English-speaking students. Such programs may be able to provide support to the school improvement effort through data they collect, strategies they have put in place, and resources the district can pool with its school improvement program resources.
- Focus scarce resources. In the past, many educational reform efforts have assumed the best way to improve performance is to develop a new program, get schools involved in it, and then evaluate it to see if it has been effective. Such a strategy generally involves new dollars to support the new program's development and operation. School improvement frequently does not require the development of a totally new program. Instead, districts can shuffle resources and focus them where they are most needed —on pressing areas of concern and in schools needing the most assistance. And they can adopt programs used successfully elsewhere.
- Stage the improvement effort. District-level coordina-

tion makes two kinds of staging possible. The first is trying a strategy in one school on a trial basis before applying it in another building, an approach that can provide information useful to other schools that follow. The second strategy relates to implementing individual school improvement plans through a step-by-step process outlined later in this chapter.

- Provide schools with access to multiple improvement strategies. Areas targeted for improvement in individual schools may involve instruction, school climate, and personnel issues. Plans to change practices in each of these three areas will require different configurations of people and resources. District-level coordination makes it easier to undertake strategies to address different problems and concerns.
- Modify district policies as needed to facilitate school improvement. These policies include staff development, curriculum coordination across and within grades, staff transfers, testing, and schedule and organizational changes in schools.

The superintendent's leadership role in school improvement does not end with his or her staff. There is also a public relations side to school reform that involves selling the effort to parents, the community, and perhaps even the school board. We focus on this later in this chapter.

All in all, superintendents can place the reform initiative on a firm footing. They can provide district policies, resources, and staff expertise. And they can back up the efforts of schools participating in the program.

Getting Educational Reform Up and Rolling

Educational reform occurs at the school level. But it's up to the superintendents and their administrators to institute changes and improvements.

Superintendents, of course, do not have a lot of time to provide hands-on school improvement assistance to schools. But they do have staff they can assign to the effort.

Support for Schools by Central Office Staff

Recent studies of school improvement efforts point out the important role central office staff play in successful programs, particularly when they cut across schools.[5]

A curriculum coordinator, staff developer, program director, or any number of central staff members can muster needed resources to provide three basic kinds of assistance. The first is a *cheerleader.* This individual builds and maintains individual school staffs' commitment to the

effort. The second is a *linker.* This person brings to the schools resources and expertise from other district personnel or from people outside the district. The third is a *troubleshooter.* He or she helps solve particularly thorny problems. In most cases, central office staff under a supportive superintendent can perform these functions and more. In other cases, central office staff can take responsibility for orchestrating the effort and ensuring that these functions are performed by external experts, if necessary.[6]

A major study of school improvement efforts which used effective practices developed with federal support, found that central office staff do the following to aid schools' individual improvement efforts:[7]

- Become familiar with the needs of the individual schools.
- Locate and help select effective practices and programs.
- Know the content of new practices and programs, their purposes, and the benefits that result from their use.
- Help arrange and conduct training in new practices and skills, working with external experts as needed.
- Arrange financial support for new practices and programs.
- Obtain endorsements of new practices and programs from the superintendent, school board, principal, and school staff.
- Work with staff to work out bugs and overcome obstacles.
- Help assess the effect of the new practice or program and plan ways to make it a part of a school's regular routine.

The new practices mentioned here can be ones developed locally. Increasingly, however, the programs will be developed and tested in other schools and districts. Having worked in those settings, they can work in others with the proper implementation.

Just how much hands-on assistance central office staff members provide individual school staff depends on how much change new practices or improvement strategies require. Major changes require long-term, intensive assistance. Research suggests that it should be sequenced to answer questions or address concerns as school staff raise them.

Studies show staff ask the following kinds of questions as they think about adopting new practices and changing normal routines: "Can I do it? How will it affect me? How can I fit all I need to do into one short day? What materials

and equipment do I need?".[8] Not everyone, of course, will welcome the changes school improvement brings. One person's school improvement strategy can smack up against another's ploy to avoid loss of status or benefits. Consequently, school improvement can involve a lot of explicit and implicit bargaining.

In general, most improvement programs create demands that go beyond what individual teachers and school staff can deal with alone. As a result, assistance and support from central office personnel can make the difference between barely dropping the effort altogether and making it work.[9] Other key actors in school improvement are school principals, as discussed in Chapter 6, and external assisters, discussed in the following section of this chapter.

Profiling Schools

Unfortunately, many improvement initiatives are based on a seat-of-the-pants assessment of poor achievement test scores. Such testing merely signals something is wrong. But it does not target a particular cause. It could be poor teaching practices, a sloppy curriculum, unfavorable working conditions, weak administrative leadership, or apathetic students. More than likely, it's a combination of two or more reasons. And they probably vary from school to school.

Improvement efforts throughout the country show that different schools within the same district usually exhibit different patterns of problems and weaknesses. Although some schools have several problems, and some problems are common to more than one school, the problems and weaknesses tend to be scattered among schools. This suggests a need for a targeted improvement effort based on individual school profiles.[10]

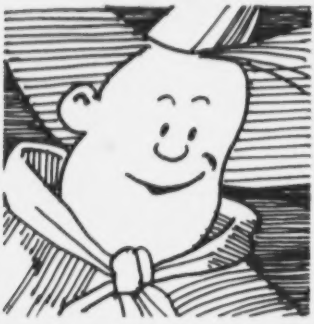
School profile information will help superintendents and individual school principals:[11]

- Set district-wide and school-level improvement goals.
- Evaluate, over time, the general impact of changes in the performance of individual schools, and in turn, the impact on the district's performance.
- Determine district priorities for allocating school improvement resources.
- Serve as a benchmark (particularly in the case of a new superintendent) against which to judge the future progress of the district.
- Verify, objectively, what superintendents and principals only now suspect about individual schools' strengths and weaknesses.

The most basic set of school-level information is data schools regularly keep. This includes student demographics such as class size, teacher-pupil ratio, and students' performance on standardized tests; students' performance on any tests directly linked to the curriculum; student absenteeism, truancy and transiency; retention and drop-out figures, suspensions, and expulsions; teacher absenteeism and transfers; and basic fiscal information.

Other valuable information, not always tracked by schools, includes instructional data such as the percentages of teachers in secondary school subjects; the amount of time spent on instruction in various subjects in elementary schools; the type of tracking or ability grouping used in schools; content across and within grade levels; and instructional materials in use.

Additional information that helps pinpoint problems can be gathered by surveying key groups in the district — board members, paraprofessionals, counselors, teachers, teaching supervisors, principals, other building administrators, parents, and students. Through questionnaires and personal and telephone interviews, these groups provide information about the school's environment — such as resources for instruction (e.g., teaching, equipment, supplies, learning opportunities, space, and timeliness of available resources); parental and community involvement in the school (e.g., involvement in policies and programs, direct parental assistance, and community receptiveness to the school, its programs and staff); school orderliness, including conduct codes and their enforcement, and school race relations; and grading practices and use of testing information for instructional planning.



Districts can also survey staff's attitudes and practices. This identifies morale and job satisfaction; expectations for students; professional development needs; and management strategies and procedures for dealing with classroom disruption and misbehavior. Finally, some districts take the time to ask students what they think of their school, classes, teachers, and ability to influence the way the school is run.

Superintendents and school staff can use this information to: (1) decide what needs improving and (2) monitor progress in making changes. Such monitoring lets a super-

intendent document the success or explain the failure of a school improvement initiative. That's particularly important because a great deal might change in a district during an improvement initiative. Personnel will quit; others will be hired. The district might introduce new programs or technology, such as computers. A bond issue might fail. The school board may undergo a shakeup; the teachers may go out on strike. As any superintendent knows, there's no end to the list of things that can unravel the district's best planned efforts.

Obviously, the superintendent isn't going to be able to prevent all problems. But with constant monitoring, he or she may catch them before they develop into full-blown disasters that threaten the program's success.

The district can look, six months or a year later, at the same indicators collected to develop school profiles at the beginning of the improvement effort. By comparing both sets of information, it can see if conditions have changed or problems have eased. If student attendance was a problem, has it increased? Have teacher transfers decreased? Are test scores improving?[12]

Providing Good Staff Development

The activities that school staff must conduct to promote school reform are not easy. They require considerable expertise and skill to perform. Therefore, districts can provide a big service to those involved in school reform efforts by offering access to good professional development opportunities. This will enable them to hone the skills required to develop and carry out successful improvement programs.

Frankly, most districts sorely need to improve their staff development and inservice programs. By and large, the programs are ineffective and unpopular. Currently, districts provide on the average five or six professional days a year for teachers to attend workshops and other professional meetings. Rarely is inservice training more than an occasional one-day workshop where teachers are lectured. Often the trainers are strong on process and short on substance, and know little about what actually goes on in classrooms. Consequently, most teachers consider these sessions a waste of time.[13]

It's ironic that so much staff development is bad. If there's one thing the research has taught us it's how to identify, operate, and even design good staff development programs.

* Present staff with carefully developed, well-defined and effective curricular, instructional, and/or administrative practices. Whatever the practice, everyone

should know what it will look like, what its key components are, what should be happening when it is used, and how to measure its effects.

- Make sure the new strategy for teachers "fits into a real, live classroom setting." And, as important, the district or school should take steps to introduce it to teachers in a way that helps them incorporate it into instruction. Teachers have a right to demand some evidence that the strategy has actually made a difference with students.
- Ensure training by credible people who can provide concrete feedback and technical assistance to staff.
- Avoid inservice programs consisting of a single session. They are largely ineffective. Teachers need to be given the content of inservice education in small chunks, over time, so that changing concerns can be addressed and only a few changes attempted at a time. The one-shot presentation in a three-day workshop simply does not work.
- Conceive of staff development as part of a comprehensive school improvement program with community support, powerful, research-based training programs, and a favorable climate for school change and reform.
- Design and tailor staff development efforts around problems the school staff identifies.
- Depend less on consultants in staff development and more on teachers and administrators, both for substance and procedural guidance.
- Ensure that staff development programs are flexible and responsive to changes in the participants and the setting.
- Ensure that principals and other administrators collaborate with teachers in planning and implementing the staff development program. Through teacher participation, administrators understand the details of the program and begin to readily see what they can do administratively to support teachers.
- Ensure community support for school reform so that sufficient resources are allocated to staff development.
- Recognize that administrators, at the district and building level, have an important role to play in staff development. They can affect changes in policy to support the program. And they can ensure that needed resources are provided, help create a climate favorable to improvement, recognize teachers participating in the training program, and relate the staff

development effort to the school's priorities for change.

- Make sure staff development is under the direction of, and involves, the entire school staff.
- Take steps to design a staff development program sensitive to the stages of concern teachers typically exhibit as they accept any new program. (See "Measuring Staff's Reaction to Change" in Chapter 8 for a discussion of these stages.)
- Use evaluation information to refine the staff development program.
- Ensure that the effective practices staff learn as a result of staff development become part of the district's program through regular training, budget, and policy cycles.[14]

Finally, a reminder: trainers in staff development sessions may be other teachers. A common finding across staff development studies is the importance of teacher-to-teacher assistance. In schools where staff development is beneficial, teachers share ideas about instruction and try out new techniques in their classrooms. Inservice teacher training by other teachers whose classroom practice has been judged exemplary or effective also works well. Networks for sharing information about exemplary practices have developed and grown in recent years as have the numbers of teachers who are very able to disseminate information about these practices to their peers. In other words, a great deal of untapped expertise resides in the average district.

Selling School Improvement Locally

All too often, school reform is a high-risk, high-stakes game in which superintendents put their reputations and jobs on the line. If the improvement is a success, the superintendent is a hero. But if it fails . . .

In one sense, all the national reports on education have made easier the job of improving schools. They have at least focused national attention on the problem. But in another sense, the reforms they propose are a hazard because they imply that the hard work of school improvement has been completed by implementing the "reforms" proposed. In fact, any improvement effort must start locally.

Astute superintendents learn early in their careers the importance of building widespread support for their improvement efforts. In short, they recognize the need to "sell" the program to key groups. Call it effective public relations.

Constituency-Building

When publicized initiatives pan out, the superintendent can bask in well-deserved recognition. But what if the improvement initiative falls short of its goals? Well, in either case the superintendent needs to ensure that key groups in the district know about the effort, its purposes, its support, and its implementation; and must keep those groups informed of the program's progress. The smart superintendent will take time to:

- *Build the school board's support for school improvement.* Creating enthusiastic support for the program among board members provides a superintendent a firm base for school improvement and develops a cadre of able spokespersons for the improvement effort.

  Superintendents who do not have board support have two choices: abandon the effort altogether or win board members over. It would be foolish to try school improvement without the approval of at least the majority of the board. And it is less than advisable to take on school improvement without the board's enthusiastic support.

- *Build community support for school improvement.* Take a lesson from effective schools identified in various studies. These schools keep parents and the community informed of expectations, successes, and, if necessary, failures. Consequently, taxpayers know how their schools spend tax dollars.

  School board meetings appear to be a natural forum for progress reports on the district's improvement initiative. Special public meetings chaired by the superintendent are another means. Some districts send a newsletter to the community. Others incorporate information about the effort in the regular communications between schools and parents.

- *Build support among district and school staff for school improvement.* School improvement requires the staff, faculty, and administrators participating in schools to actively support school improvement. And they need the backup and support of district staff to help them in their reform efforts.

Setting Realistic Improvement Expectations

Despite the current fervor to make every school in America an effective one, school improvement takes place under a variety of constraints that often make school reform difficult. The superintendent, therefore, must set and communicate realistic reform expectations to key groups.

The fact is, not every school will be a perfect school at the end of the improvement program. And some schools probably will not improve at all. Superintendents can also anticipate that schools are not going to perform substantially better after only one year of an improvement effort. School improvement is a long-term, multi-year venture, a fact the superintendent needs to convey to key audiences so they do not expect overnight results.

School improvement goals cannot be too easy. Nor can they be a wish list the superintendent has little hope of delivering. Superintendents who carry out successful improvement efforts set and share with everyone goals they feel they can attain.

Selling Strategies

Superintendents know better than us how to sell school reform locally. They'll do most of the following:[15]

- State publicly that school improvement is an important district priority.
- Show active support for the effort in symbolic ways, including visiting schools participating in the improvement program and seeking teachers' ideas of needed changes.
- Create psychological and material incentives for staff to initiate and participate in change.
- Ensure that key pieces of information about the improvement effort are communicated to the community, school board, and the district's own staff and faculty. These include:
  - Membership, responsibilities and activities of school improvement teams (if this mechanism is used),
  - The rationale underlying the improvement program — why the district began the effort and its improvement philosophy,
  - School improvement goals and a timetable for achieving them,
  - Areas needing improvement and how they were targeted,
  - District resources (e.g., staff time, money, and materials) that will be spent on the improvement effort,
  - Qualifications and activities of experts from outside the district who may be involved in the effort,
  - How interested parents and others can find out more about the effort and how the district intends to keep them updated, and
  - Any good news about strengths in particular schools and across the district.

One word about the last piece of information included in this list. Often people concerned with their local schools are unaware of the schools' positive features, i.e., what they are doing right. As they kick off an improvement effort, superintendents have an ideal opportunity to tell what district schools are doing well and what they intend to do better.

Chapter Six

Organizing the School Reform Posse

Participants in school reform include principals, teachers, other school staff, parents, and outside experts. But someone needs to promote their involvement in the effort. Who better than the superintendent?

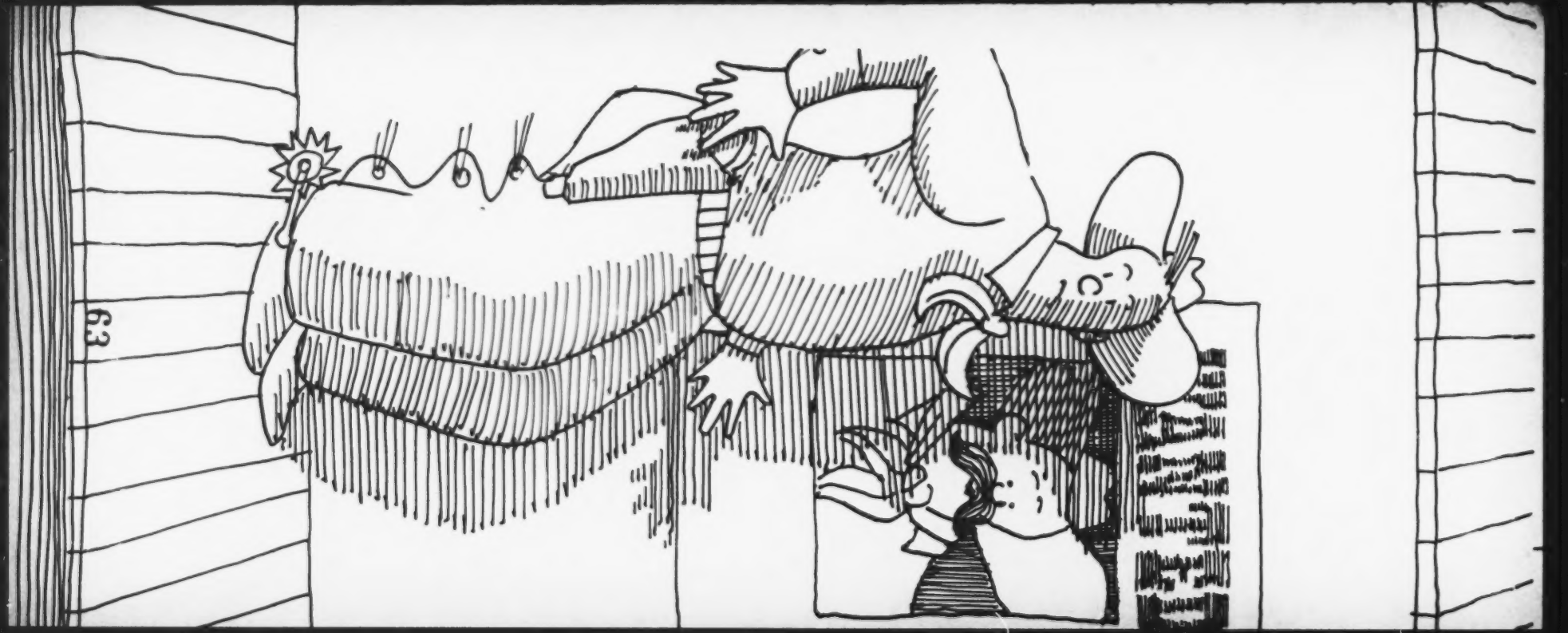
In this chapter we outline strategies superintendents can use for ensuring building-level improvement leadership, rallying school staff, enlisting expert help from outside the district, and encouraging parent involvement.

Ensuring Building-Level School Improvement Leadership

It comes as no surprise that an individual school's capability to carry out school improvement hinges on the leadership in that building. Therefore, legitimizing the role of school staff who have the skills to steer an individual building's efforts is an important task for superintendents. And this involves taking a long, hard look at the district's principals before getting too far into the effort.

As we discussed in "The 'Great Principal' Notion" in Chapter 3, the principal is in the best position to promote a building's improvement effort. But will the principals involved in all the schools participating in the district's reform effort play a leadership role? Probably not. Some won't want to support the effort; others simply may lack the required skills. We suggest superintendents consider these questions as they examine the school improvement leadership in their buildings:

- Can the principal direct the school's improvement effort?
- Does the principal have the capacity to be part of the solution, or is he or she part of the school's problem?
- Will a lack of direction on the principal's part leave a void no one can fill?
- If the principal will not or cannot direct the effort, who can?
- If others assume a role in directing the effort, will the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principal support the effort?

One problem with the "great principal" notion is its focus on who carries out instructional leadership activities rather than on the activities themselves. Consequently, if districts lack the appropriate personnel, all seems lost. But it needn't be. Research stresses the importance of support functions — those activities necessary for successful school improvement and change. It is less important who performs these functions than that they are carried out. Improvement leadership, for example, can be shared among subordinates. That is, common sense argues, and research confirms, that other staff, such as assistant principals, supervising teachers, curriculum specialists, reading coordinators, and department chairpersons, can direct the effort, particularly with ongoing technical assistance.[1] Far from reflecting a managerial or administrative weakness on the part of the principal, these alternatives reflect a "higher order" executive characteristic — the delegation of authority.

Expectations for School Improvement Leadership

Research tells us that the following short list of activities is performed by principals in schools with successful improvement and change efforts.[2] Our contention is that other staff can carry out these activities, provided they have some help from the district or outside experts.

- Inform all staff that success of the school improvement effort is a top priority.
- Make sure required materials are available.
- Make sure teachers have ready access to personnel within and outside the district with special expertise.
- Provide a schoolwide climate conducive to ongoing problem solving.
- Make sure teachers are given time to actually use new practices and strategies by rearranging classroom schedules, and by facilitating schoolwide scheduling.
- Allow teachers to figure out on their own how to meet expectations.

Granted, school improvement leadership can come from a critical mass of staff with vision and energy, but the principal must be supportive. At the very least, the principal must tolerate the program so the changes it brings can be introduced into the system and maintained over time. Active hostility will thwart the activity of all other staff members in the school.

If a principal is hostile, the superintendent should replace him or her. If that's not possible than neither is school

improvement. The leadership lack is with the superintendent, not with the principal. Sorry, but the key actor in any improvement effort is the superintendent — backed up by the board, district staff and school staff.

Rallying School Staff

Successful improvement efforts are built by school staff. As we've mentioned before, the consensus among those who have studied success is that staff in individual schools were given the latitude to construct their own improvement efforts. Put simply, a school's faculty and administrators need to "own" an improvement program if they are going to carry it out.

This ownership and involvement is a direct result of faculty and administration participation in planning and instituting the effort. Ideally, the schools' staff develop improvement plans, present them to the central office, and periodically report to the superintendent how the program is progressing. By going through this process, schools can accomplish the following:[3]

- Develop commonly shared academic goals and high expectations.
- Frame the school's purpose in terms of a few overarching goals, which provide a framework for all other school activities; in the process focus on those tasks the school deems most important.
- Encourage collaborative planning and collegial relationships among staff. (Change occurs more successfully when teachers and administrators work together.)
- Continually monitor school and classroom performance. Keep parents informed of their child's progress on a regular basis and let them know about the school improvement effort's goals and activities.

Obviously, schools need a mechanism to accomplish the activities we've listed. That is, they need a structure that enables teachers, supervisors, principals, aides, subject-matter specialists, and others to offer suggestions, comment on improvement strategies, and, if they choose, become actively involved in formulating and carrying it out. One such mechanism is the school improvement or school leadership team.[4]

School Improvement Teams

A school improvement team assumes responsibility for planning improvements and overseeing their implementation in individual buildings. Because school reform is hard, time-consuming work, this "many-hands-make-light-work" approach makes good sense.

Improvement team members:

- Collect information about their school, staff, and students to identify weaknesses that need to be corrected and strengths on which the school can capitalize. We discussed such profile information in Chapter 5. It includes data on achievement, student behavior and attitudes, staff morale, and school climate.
- When necessary, seek additional help from outside experts or specially trained district staff, to identify schools' strengths and weaknesses.
- Target and gain staff acceptance of areas for improvement. Again, this may require additional help from district specialists or outside experts.
- Develop and validate with the full staff a plan to address the areas targeted for the improvement program. The plan should include strategies and procedures to strengthen weak areas. Experts with a good knowledge of effective practices and the ability to match them to schools' needs are useful at this stage.
- Monitor the implementation of planned activities and check for results. Arrange for training as needed to get the whole staff up to speed and involved. A district evaluation specialist could help the team out here. The team will monitor how things are going and make adjustments and midcourse corrections as needed.

Team Make-Up

Ideally, the school improvement team includes at least three or more teachers, a building-level administrator — probably the principal — a central office professional, and perhaps an outside consultant. Other specialists from inside and outside the district could be added from time to time.

Teachers should make up the majority of the team. After all, many of the changes the program will undoubtedly seek will take place in the classroom. Teachers, therefore, can make or break a school improvement effort. Superintendents interested in forming school improvement teams, should check the suggestions in Chapter 8.

Team Limitations

School improvement teams can manage an improvement effort particularly well when their energies are directed toward certain problem areas.[5] These include, for example, school climate and student management issues (e.g., quality of school life, student attendance, and hall and

lunchroom behavior). Other problems, unfortunately, are not easily solved even by an improvement team.

For example, additional expertise is generally needed when instruction is an issue. Let's say, school profiles show that student achievement in basic skills is a problem in certain subjects at specific grade levels (e.g., sixth grade math, eighth grade English). In such cases, districts should augment the team with teachers skilled in the targeted areas, instructional supervisors, and/or subject matter specialists.

Administrators need to be involved when the problem evolves around personnel issues. A principal is the appropriate person when the problem resides in an individual school. A personnel problem common to all schools (e.g., concern over the roles of nonteaching professionals) indicates a need for central office involvement.

Some problems might initially require a district-level solution followed by individual building plans. For instance, if inconsistent enforcement of disciplinary rules is identified as a problem across several schools, a broad solution may be in order. To solve the problem, the principals of these schools might work with district personnel who have the authority to put a system-wide improvement strategy in place.

Finally, some schools may have a number of severe problems. A school with chronic truancy, high vandalism, poor student achievement, lack of parental involvement and support, high teacher absenteeism and a weak principal, needs all the help it can get. In fact, in such cases, needed improvements are undoubtedly beyond the means of any improvement team effort. Corrective actions may require board action to make the kind of changes this school needs.

Generally speaking, schools participating in a school improvement effort are functioning reasonably well. Schools with multiple or particularly severe problems need to be singled out for more intensive help.

Enlisting Reinforcements

We honestly believe schools cannot improve alone. Reform is time consuming and difficult. And it requires the active participation of people with specialized expertise. Although much of the technical know-how to promote school reform undoubtedly resides in the district, superintendents are well advised to seek external experts for additional improvement expertise and assistance.

Even if district staff are specialized, they can still benefit from external expertise. They know the latest develop-

ments in school improvement, can separate proven from less effective school improvement strategies, and are able to suggest alternative approaches tailored to the district's unique needs.

All external expertise falls under the broad category of technical assistance — providing the best available information, guidance, and help, in an appropriate time and manner to increase a school's and district's effectiveness. We offer this definition because it hints at an important feature of the relationship between external expertise and districts. The district defines the need or problem that requires a consultant's assistance and the district controls the parameters of the relationship, a point discussed at length under "Making Experts Work for You."

How External Experts Can Help

And just what can outsiders do for a school improvement effort? Quite a lot, actually. For example, they can conduct a range of activities to help staff adjust to, and accomplish, changes that school improvement entails. These activities include assisting in planning and implementing programs, encouraging staff's participation in school improvement decision-making, and analyzing problems and conflict. In addition, they can find resources for schools, including linking schools to information outside the district. More specifically, external experts contribute to successful improvement efforts if they:[6]

- Make school people aware of new or particularly effective practices and strategies,
- Help school people choose practices and strategies which match local needs,
- Work with local administrators, teachers, and the school board to develop a commitment to effective practices and strategies,
- Arrange and conduct training in how to use various practices,
- Provide materials that might be needed to install practices,
- Work through the details of the practices with teachers, by planning implementation schedules and paying attention to the specifics of actually using them in the classroom,
- Provide follow-up help and evaluation assistance as implementation progresses, and
- Help develop plans so the practices will become a regular part of the routine in schools.

External experts have an advantage for the single reason that they are outsiders. Internal experts often find them-

selves commenting on the district's rights and wrongs. That doesn't generally put the insider in an easy or enviable position. In contrast, it is much easier for external experts to give this type of advice. In addition, it is likely to be received better.

Outsiders seem particularly helpful at the outset of a school improvement effort when they can assist in planning and introducing changes. Outside experts are also well suited to follow up when problems start to stall implementation.

Experts' Qualifications

External experts — trainers, consultants, and resource providers — should be highly credible. Superintendents should make the effort to ensure that external experts have had classroom experience, know the practices and strategies they are recommending to staff, and know how to work with adult learners.

Common sense should caution the superintendent not to have unreasonable expectations about the experts' range of expertise. If districts ask them to provide a broad range of technical assistance services, they shouldn't be expected to have skills in subject matter. But it is not unreasonable to expect them to have access to content expertise so they can broker more specialized assistance if it is needed.

Districts might look for the following kinds of qualifications in outside experts:[7]

- Knowledge about educational systems and how they operate,
- Knowledge about program content (if applicable),
- Knowledge about information sources and resource bases,
- Communication skills,
- Problem-solving skills (helping to identify problems, suggesting alternatives, initiating appropriate action, evaluating adjustments to unpredictable changes),
- Interpersonal skills (gaining entry and building trust, understanding the internal system, and working within the power structure),
- Leadership and management skills (supporting cooperation, collaboration, and coordination; exercising adaptability and flexibility, and facilitating sharing), and
- Perception skills (interpreting interpersonal dynamics, timing, perceiving need for clarification, intervening when appropriate).

Making Experts Work For You

Outside experts are invaluable. They provide information and services that may be crucial to the success of school improvement efforts. However, superintendents need to be wary of too much dependency on these outsiders. In the best of all possible worlds, outsiders should work to foster the staff's ownership of the program and their capacity to make it work without continued assistance. In short, the expertise should be working itself out of a job. As staff gain experience with new procedures and practices, external support should be gradually withdrawn.

Superintendents can take steps to set some parameters on the outsiders' involvement in school improvement by defining and structuring their role. We suggest providing answers to the following questions: What type of assistance should be provided? How formalized should the role be? Should the expert provide technical assistance to a few or many schools?

Defining the role in terms of the type of assistance experts provide will be heavily influenced by the kind of outcome the improvement program seeks. Districts are wise to define the technical assistance role through negotiations with potential outside experts. In many cases, this doesn't happen. As a result, experts often provide less-than-hoped-for services and districts feel cheated.

Encouraging Parent Involvement

There's no doubt that parents play a major role in their children's learning. Studies consistently tell us, in fact, that "children whose parents encourage and support schooling have an added advantage in school."[8] Recognizing this fact, several of the national education reports talk about the role parents might play in schooling — encourage and monitor their children's school work, participate in school activities, serve as model learners, participate in board elections, and volunteer at their children's school. The National Commission on Excellence even ends its report with a message to parents.

But which types of parent involvement are most beneficial to students, parents, teachers, and schools? Should schools emphasize the parent's role as a tutor at home? Or, should they organize parent volunteer programs? Is it enough for teachers to communicate with parents in such traditional ways as parent-teacher conferences, notes to home, and phone calls? Or do districts need to take additional steps, such as organizing a home learning program so parents know more about their children's school program?[9] Researchers provide superintendents some an-

swers to these questions.

Studies confirm what superintendents and principals already know: few parents have the time to volunteer. Thus parents are not likely to line up to help in the classroom, assist teachers on class trips, work on fundraising activities, or help out in the library.

Many parents, though, are anxious to support their children's schooling by working with them at home. Studies, in fact, show that many parents already help their children without any direction from teachers. And many parents would welcome teachers' ideas and guidance. When teachers ask parents for help, they respond. And they consider the teachers who communicate frequently with parents to be the better teachers.[10]

Researchers suggest districts adopt policies that enable, encourage, and reward teachers to emphasize parent involvement in school and at home. Such policies might include support for inservice programs and workshops to help teachers develop parents' skills in home-learning activities. Frankly, if districts have only one policy area to stress, then researchers would argue the biggest pay off for parents comes from teachers involving them in learning activities at home.[11]

Involving Parents in Home Learning

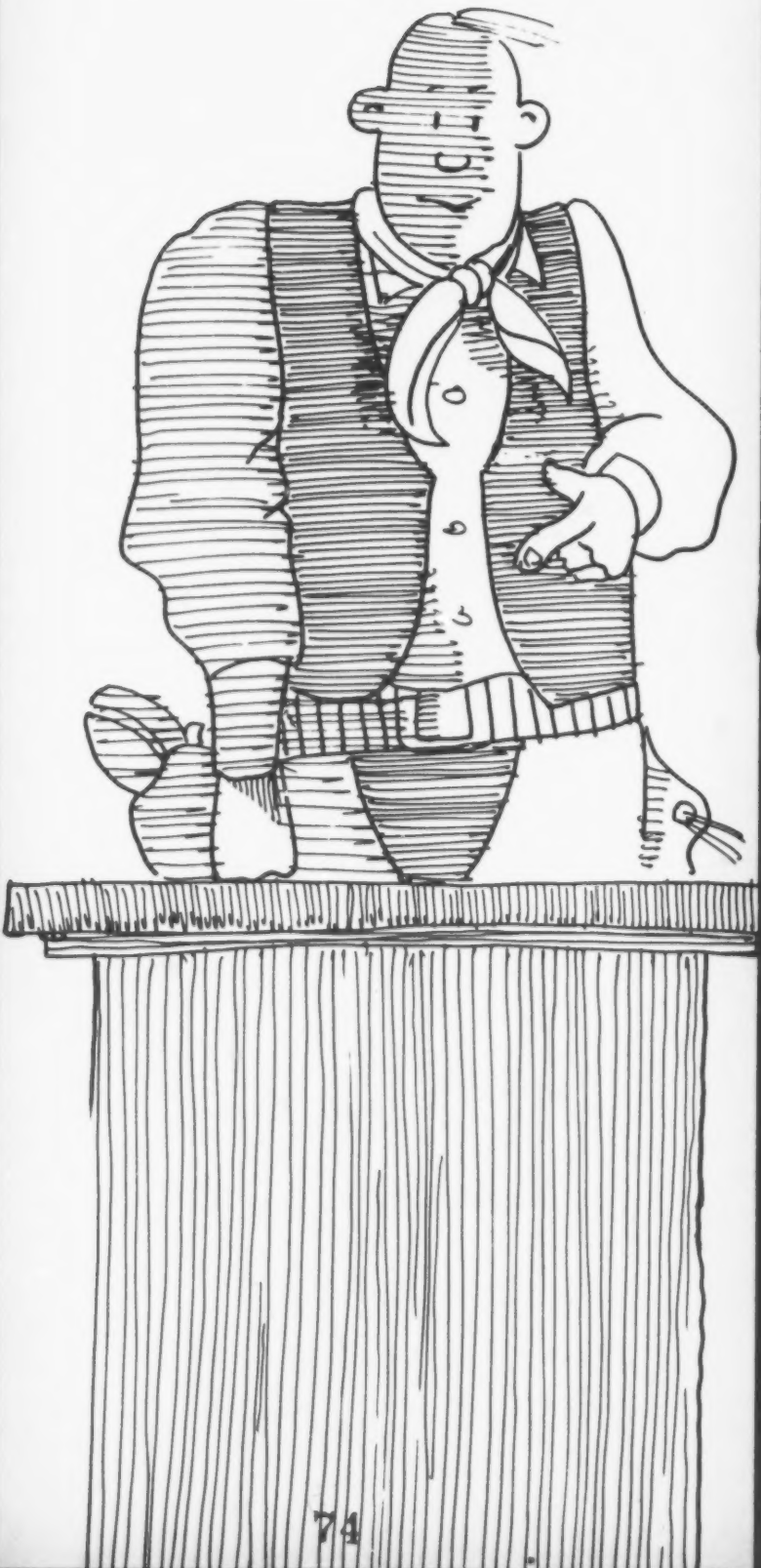
Although schools should undoubtedly continue to encourage parent involvement at school, involving parents in home learning has substantial pay offs. Specifically, parents involved in such a way, report knowing more about the school program. They also rate teachers higher in interpersonal skills and overall quality.

Any number of different strategies are available to involve parents in home learning activities, including the following:

- Get parents to read aloud to their child or listen to their child read.
- Loan parents books or workbooks to give extra help to their children.
- Ask parents to take their child to the library.
- Encourage parents to play games that help their children learn.
- Provide parents with materials which enable them to give their children math and spelling drills.
- Give an assignment that requires children to ask their parents questions.
- Ask parents to watch a specific television program with their child and to discuss it afterwards.
- Send home suggestions for game and group activities that can be played by parent and child and are related to the child's school work.
- Suggest how parents might use the home environment (daily materials and activities such as books, magazines, and games) to stimulate their child's interest in school work.
- Establish a formal agreement where parents supervise and assist their children in completing homework assignments.
- Establish a formal agreement where the parent provides rewards and/or penalties based on their children's performance and behavior in school.
- Visit students' homes. Although infrequently used, home visits enable teachers to lay the groundwork for communication with parents. Visits are arranged on weekends or before the beginning of the school year by parents, teachers, or even the principal. Some schools give teachers release time for such visits. Other schools establish half-days for children so that the teachers' visits occur on afternoons when school is out of session. Others allocate full days for teachers' visits when there is no school.
- Encourage summer learning at home. This may be an especially important area for home-school programs since summer activities for parents could help students maintain skills from one school year to the next. Some teachers, for example, send home calendars of summer activities involving parents and their children that help improve or retain basic skills learned during the school year.

"Tips To Share with Staff," the guide's final chapter, con-

tains other information related to parent involvement. "Communicating with Parents" is a short summary of strategies appropriate for elementary schools and those which work well at the secondary level.



Chapter Seven

What *Really* Matters in School Improvement

Everything we've talked about up to this point matters in school improvement. Everything. And that includes building support for school improvement; providing schools with hands-on assistance, including good staff development opportunities; enlisting outside help as needed; profiling schools to set improvement priorities and monitor changes; ensuring adequate building-level leadership; recognizing school improvement myths; and heeding those national education reports that have something to offer.

Superintendents interested in meaningful school improvement should attend to all these tasks. But if we had to prioritize the list, we'd suggest the three in this chapter: what is taught, how learning is measured, and how effectively we utilize teachers' time and organize for instruction.

Taking a Cold, Hard Look at the Curriculum

School reform offers superintendents an opportunity to reexamine the district's curriculum. In fact, if they fail to do this, we'd suggest they will be remiss. The curriculum is that important. But we fear districts may fail to take a cold, hard look at their curriculum in a rush to beef up course offerings and toughen standards.

As we pointed out in Chapter 3, the National Commission on Excellence recommended that all students learn the "New Basics."

It also suggested rigorous programs to advance students' personal, educational, and occupational goals (e.g., vocational education). The Commission would like to see elementary schools provide a sound base in English language development and writing, computational and problem-solving skills, science, social studies, foreign language, and the arts.[1]

Today, in other words, the three "r's" won't suffice. In fact, many thoughtful educators believe that any common core of learning should go beyond what we typically think of as

the basic skills. What's included in this core is an issue facing superintendents, as is the continuity and sequence of the curriculum. Superintendents interested in curriculum reform should also be thinking about their district's textbooks. Curriculum reform, in our judgment, should precede the district's effort to institute tougher standards and more required courses.

The superintendent should first ensure that the district is offering a curriculum that is fair to all students. Second, he or she should ensure that all students have access to instruction in the range of skills, knowledge, and competencies they will need in adult life. Every superintendent will say this is already in place. Therefore, we're down to two important issues for superintendents to consider: (1) the continuity and sequence in the curriculum and (2) what might be included in it.

The Common Core Versus Electives

There has always been a push and pull in American education between a common core and a differentiated curriculum where students are free to choose many of their courses. As the student body has become more and more diversified, schools have been pressed toward differentiating the curricula to capture the students' interest and keep them in school.[2] As a result, several curricular standards operate in American schools at the same time. Within the same high school, students can have vastly different educational experiences.[3] Among other options, there is the college-prep curriculum, a watered down version of it for students, a series of poorly coordinated elective courses, and vocational preparation.

Standing against this trend is a continuing belief in the importance of some common set of studies for all students — a common core of shared knowledge and beliefs. This core, it's been suggested, could include required courses in literature, the arts, foreign language, history, civics, science, math, technology, and health. And beyond this common core, schools could offer a carefully selected cluster of electives so students could pursue their unique aptitudes and interests. Under such a scheme, electives would be a carefully planned program. It might include five or six courses that would permit advanced study in selected academic subjects, or the exploration of career options (e.g., computer science, office management, health services, and the arts).[4]

Curriculum Continuity and Learning Risks

Even while the debate over electives and common-core

courses rages on, districts should examine their course offerings. Based on this examination, the district should take steps to make sure courses are offered in key content areas (e.g., math and science, literature and language, social studies, the arts, and vocational education). It might institute policies to ensure that students take a minimum number of courses in each area. Similarly, districts expecting elementary students to acquire basic reading, writing, oral communication, citizenship, math skills, and so on could take steps to ensure that the curriculum: (1) addresses these areas and (2) focuses on critical skills. While they're at it, the districts could coordinate the skills across grade levels.

When districts look at their overall curriculum, they can spot "learning opportunity" risks.[5] These are gaps, mismatches, or flaws in instruction and/or in the curriculum that result in lowered student performance. Some critical skill should have been taught but wasn't. The district should pinpoint and eliminate these deficiencies.

Learning opportunity risks affect students' performance at a particular grade level. They also depress students' performance in later grades because building-block skills haven't been mastered.

A district can identify learning opportunity risks by first describing the instructional materials in use and the learning opportunities they provide. Next, the district measures students' performance by using tests keyed to instruction and the curriculum. Finally, the learning opportunities and students' performance are compared. Districts can then take appropriate corrective action.

A technology for identifying learning opportunity risks is in use in several districts around the country. The technology is described in more detail in reports listed at the end of this chapter.[6]

The assumption underlying this approach is that students miss opportunities to learn critical skills because of weaknesses in the design of the curriculum and instructional program. The problem is particularly acute at the elementary level where the curriculum is set to a great extent by textbooks.

The Curriculum and Textbooks

Although we do not have a standardized curriculum in this country, what is taught in schools is largely determined by textbook publishers and their consultants. In fact, a few textbooks, similar in content and format, dominate in each subject area. Consequently, they tend to standardize the curriculum, particularly in elementary schools.

Educators should have serious reservations about the

quality of today's textbooks. Publishers, for example, have tended to reduce the reading levels while also weakening the content of their texts. The publishers explain away this tendency by saying they are under pressure from districts to provide texts for an increasingly diverse student body.[7]

Acknowledging this state of affairs, the National Commission suggests that publishers upgrade their textbooks to ensure more rigorous content, to reflect current applications of technology, and to capture the best available research and scholarship. The Commission also recommends that textbook-adoption committees demand rigorous and challenging books, and require publishers to furnish information on effectiveness.[8] We couldn't agree more.

A Word About Curriculum Guidelines

Most state and district curriculum guides constitute a "conceptual swamp."[9] There's a little something for everyone in the guides — curriculum goals, activities, instructional resources, suggestions for evaluation, suggested materials, hints for teaching, and, on occasion, suggestions for allocating time. But what's missing is a definite statement of a few major goals and objectives around which schools can build a sequential and balanced instructional program. As disturbing, districts seem to be taking already massive state guidelines and defining still more specific goals and objectives. Because the guides contain so much information, generally poorly organized, it's hard to sort out what's essential. Without belaboring the point, we'll only suggest that superintendents spend some time reviewing their districts' curriculum guides. It'll be an eye opener for most.

Testing What's Taught

Declining test scores spurred many districts' interest in starting a school improvement program. More than likely, these are scores on standardized achievement tests. Results probably show students are not performing as well as students in neighboring districts, or students across the state, or even perhaps students nationwide. As a result, the superintendent is determined to "get the scores up."

Trying to increase standardized achievement test scores is a poor school improvement goal. And the effort draws attention away from the kinds of tests that can play a role in improving schools' instructional programs and students' performance. These tests, in contrast to standardized tests: (1) accurately reflect what is taught in the district's schools, (2) provide information that can be used to make contin-

ued improvements, and (3) capture the effects of instructional or curricular changes instituted as part of the improvement effort.

Standardized Tests Have No Place in School Improvement

Standardized achievement tests are venerated in America. After all, they have been around a long time. These norm-referenced tests were developed in a period of booming enrollments and school district expansion. Schools, adopting the cult of efficiency that permeated industry, sought to justify their performance in quantitative terms.[10] And for all their flaws as measures of schooling, standardized achievement tests do provide valuable comparative information.

But standardized tests have another attribute that makes them inappropriate as measures of school improvement. They are completely divorced from the curriculum. These tests compare students' performance to that of a representative group of students who previously completed the test. Consequently, test items are designed to spread students out and produce a wide range of performance so such comparisons are possible. The test shows a few high achievers, a few low achievers, and plugs the majority of students in the middle or average range. In fact, test developers go to great lengths to maintain this performance curve. If, for example, the majority of students taking the test obtain the same or similar scores, test developers go back to the drawing table and change the items to spread the scores out again. Items that most students answer correctly are labeled "bad" and are reworked or eliminated altogether.[11]

In spite of these attributes, the National Commission on Excellence recommends that districts administer standardized tests. The Commission suggests these tests be given at major transition points from one level of schooling to another, particularly from high school to work and college. Such testing, the Commission argues, would be used to certify credentials, pinpoint the need for remedial work, and identify enrichment opportunities. The National Science Board's report echoes a similar sentiment, suggesting districts use standardized achievement tests to measure both student and teacher performance.

Such recommendations raise the concerns of researchers who say emphatically that this is a misuse of standardized tests. They warn, " ...the kinds of standardized achievement tests now commonly used in U.S. schools will fail to serve one of the most important func-

tions of tests and examinations — focusing teaching and learning activities. For this purpose, we need examination systems that are tied to the curriculum."[12]

Studies show that districts gamble when using standardized tests to measure instructional effects. The amount of overlap between content taught and content tested ranges from a low of 4 percent for some students, to a high of 95 percent for others. Districts choosing the wrong test put themselves at a real disadvantage, but all do themselves a disservice by relying on standardized achievements in the first place since these tests cannot capture the effects of their curriculum and instructional program.[13]

Similarly, standardized achievement tests do not provide superintendents with much information. Their improvement program probably involves changes in the curriculum and modifications in classroom instruction. But standardized achievement tests will not tell superintendents how those specific changes are affecting students' performance because the tests do not reflect what happened before or after the change. Nor will the tests provide staff with information they can use to continue their improvement.

Surely the most widely cited standardized test, and one discussed by the National Commission, is the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). But researchers and the test's developer agree that the SAT does not measure school effectiveness. And yet "reformers," who ought to know better, use it as a barometer of a school's health and performance.

A Testing Alternative for School Improvement

Superintendents can, of course, use alternative measures to assess the effectiveness of schools' instructional programs. The alternative is instruction-referenced tests. Students' performance on these tests does not resemble the familiar bell-shaped curve of standardized achievement tests. Instead, scores fall into a J curve. That is, the majority of students do well on the test and their scores cluster at the upper portion of the scale. And that's exactly what you should find from students who have been taught, and who have learned, the material expected of them.

The decision to use such tests to measure a district's efforts to improve instruction and increase achievement requires districts to take a look at their objectives and curriculum. And this, in turn, may mean taking time to clarify fuzzy objectives or to ensure that critical skills receive sufficient emphasis within and across grade levels.

Basically, these alternatives to standardized tests rely on a three-way match between objectives, instruction, and test

items. That match is called "curriculum alignment."[14] And its underlying logic is hard to fault: teach students what you expect them to learn, and only test students on what they have had the opportunity to learn. That sounds simple enough. It makes good common sense. But it's uncommon practice.

All in all, aligning a curriculum:

- Provides a strong link to instruction. This approach to testing evaluates actual classroom instruction and the impact of teaching materials used in classrooms. In other words, it is an assessment system built around what occurs in classrooms.
- Provides instructional improvement information. That is, these tests or profiles let schools know how they are doing instructionally and where they are going. Analysis of test results shows where instruction is weak on important skills. Thus, it is possible to identify instructional strengths and weaknesses in a particular school, subject or skill area, or classroom. Teachers can receive printouts on each student, a composite of their classes, and a composite for all classes at a grade level. Principals can receive composites of performance for all students and all classes.
- Assists districts in school improvement decision-making. Districts can analyze the test or profile information to assess program effectiveness and pinpoint areas and schools needing improvement assistance.

A teacher in a classroom, the faculty of one school, or an entire school district can align a curriculum. It is particularly effective in promoting improvement when instituted district wide. We describe the step-by-step process involved in aligning a curriculum in Chapter 8, "Tips To Share with Staff."

Providing Time for Excellence

We've talked a lot about time. Chapter 2, for example, discussed the National Commission on Excellence's recommendations to add time by lengthening the school day and school year. Chapter 4 included a section on increasing students' time-on-task. This section offers suggestions for making the best use of available time from yet another perspective, that of the teacher.

Districts (probably through no fault of their own) often ask teachers to change their practices and adopt new programs as part of a school improvement effort without letting them catch their breath. No one gives school personnel the time to consider the changes requested of them. And no

one provides them with the time to plan their own instructional changes and improvements.

Time To Deal with Change

Researchers have clearly shown that the change required for school improvement raises teachers' personal concerns.[15] Furthermore, their concerns change as they become more familiar with the improvement program. These changes, in turn, affect the way they go about implementing the effort.

For example, early in any change process a number of personal concerns emerge. At this point superintendents can expect staff to be uncertain about the demand the school improvement program puts on them. And they'll worry about their adequacy in meeting the demand, and even about their role in the effort. They will spend time and energy examining the reward structure inherent in the program (i.e., incentives for improving effectiveness) and where they fit into the program's decision-making. They'll also worry about the status implications of the school improvement effort (e.g., what happens if they don't improve as much as other schools in the district?).

Later, staff become more concerned with the program's impact on students, with relating with other colleagues involved in the effort, and with achieving the maximum outcomes for themselves and their school.

An expanded discussion of the kinds of concerns teachers typically exhibit and how these affect their implementation of any program is included in Chapter 8 along with a description of instruments researchers have developed to measure these changes.

Long-term staff development programs help teachers deal with their changing concerns in an adaptive way. Providing teachers with time to meet informally with one another to share their concerns and find ways to cope with them also helps.

Time for Planning Improvements

Teachers need more professional development and planning time, as well as more time for pursuing their involvement in ongoing school improvement activities. Several reform reports include recommendations in these areas. The Carnegie Foundation's report recommends that districts limit secondary teachers' class load to no more than four classes per day, increase teachers' daily preparation time, and add a two-week professional development period to the school year. Similarly, the Education Commission of the States' report suggests that districts hire teachers for an 11-month year, again with appropriate

compensation. The National Commission on Excellence also suggests additional time for school improvement activities.

Increasing Time Available for Instruction

A number of policies under the control of a district's and individual school's control affect time in classrooms. They can help schools make the most of the time available for instruction.[16]

Setting Standards for Student Behavior

Clear and consistently enforced policies in student attendance and tardiness can produce an atmosphere of high academic expectations and reduce tardiness and absence rates, both of which rob valuable instructional time.

Similarly, when school staff take the time to develop and enforce policies about appropriate student behavior, they're telling students that school is for learning and behavior that interferes with it will not be tolerated.

Chapter 8 contains a set of questions superintendents might share with school staff who wish to review their policies in this area.

Minimizing Classroom Interruptions

Effective schools are ones where classroom time is protected and classes are relatively free from interruptions. That is, the public address system remains quiet, the number of requests for students to come to the office during class time is low, and instruction time is sacred.

Paying Attention To Scheduling

There are at least three ways to look at scheduling. First, schools often have yearly schedules that specify how much time can be allotted to instruction in various curricular areas and when evaluations and tests must be given before students can progress to new subjects and materials. If developed in consultation with teachers, such policies can help them plan their instruction and make the best use of instructional time.

Second, although the typical six-hour school day is pretty well structured, school staff might possibly trim here and there. For example, they can easily check the number of special events scheduled and decide on some acceptable upper limit.

Third, the manner in which classes are scheduled frequently reduces available instructional time. Take for example, an elementary math class scheduled for the hour before lunch. The first 10 minutes might be spent collecting the lunch money; the last 10, lining students up for the meal.

Looking at Grouping Practices

The use of grouping, individualization, or whole-class instruction means a trade-off between increased management time and greater instructional efficiency. No technique is superior to another, but they all affect the amount of time available for instruction and how efficiently that time is used. And decisions about grouping are made in light of decisions about pacing, the curriculum, student attention to instruction, and the appropriateness of that instruction.

Improving Teachers' Managerial Skills

Teachers make a great many decisions about time use, grouping students, and pacing instruction in face of the realities of instructing 30 or more students in one classroom or as many as five classes at the secondary level. Their management skills vary. Some teachers maximize the amount of time available and others routinely lose time by late starts, early endings and long transitions between activities.

Chapter Eight

Tips To Share with Staff

We close with a smorgasbord of strategies, instruments, and suggestions for getting school improvement started. We've included them for superintendents to pass along to staff — administrators, teachers, and curriculum and evaluation specialists.

Our list of tips is not exhaustive but it does include some helpful strategies. For example, there's a checklist of questions for reviewing school conduct codes. And we've described fairly specific steps for developing tests that are sensitive to instruction.

Staff may be familiar with the tips listed here so our summaries will act as a review. But in other cases, the tips may suggest a strategy staff had not considered before.

Briefly, we've included:

Tips To Share with School Administrators

- *Communicating with Parents* — outlines some alternative ways schools can communicate with parents, suggests strategies particularly effective in elementary grades and those well-suited for secondary schools, and summarizes the kinds of information schools might communicate to parents.
- *Forming School Improvement Teams* — suggests a method for involving school staff in the management of individual buildings' improvement effort.
- *Reviewing Schools' Conduct Codes* — presents a set of questions a school can ask concerning the substance and administration of its conduct code.

Tips To Share with Teachers

- *Organizing Classrooms for Excellence* — provides a run down of some effective practices related to: the classroom learning environment, classroom administration, classroom instruction, and teaching style.
- *Preventing Student Misbehavior in the Classroom* — includes suggestions for developing rules to govern student behavior during instruction and during non-

instructional activities; routines for handling administrative tasks; and procedures for monitoring student responsibility and accountability for work.

Tips To Share with Curriculum and Evaluation Staff

- *Measuring the Quality of School Life* — describes a scale to gather information on students' perceptions of the quality of school life — their satisfaction with school, commitment to classwork, and reactions to teachers.
- *Measuring Staff's Reaction to Change* — describes a particularly effective way to track change in the behavior and attitudes of staff implementing a new program.
- *Matching Instruction and Testing* — describes a procedure for matching objectives, instruction, and the district's testing program so tests do, in fact, measure what is taught.
- *Defining a Program or Practice* — outlines a procedure for summarizing the components of a new program or practice and requirements for putting them in place.

Communicating with Parents

A variety of communication strategies are commonly ignored by districts and schools when communicating with

parents. Some are particularly well-suited for parents of secondary students while others seem to work particularly well at the elementary level. School administrators may want to consider a range of communication strategies.

Alternative Communication Strategies

Traditional methods schools use to communicate with parents include report cards, parent orientation meetings, an occasional open house, individual conferences, and letters and calls home. Research suggests additional mechanisms as well:

- classroom and school newsletters
- interim progress reports sent home half-way through the marking period *
- special notices
- homework to be acknowledged
- information hotline *
- recorded message *
- resource center
- handbook
- community event
- tutorial guide

*Particularly effective at the secondary level.

Communication Strategies and Grade Level

In contrast to parents of elementary students, parents of older students don't seek teachers out or initiate much direct contact. Instead, they express an interest in being kept informed about their children's progress on a periodic and "as-needed" basis. They generally won't contact the school unless it requests it.

Exemplary communication practices at all levels include:

- reporting unsatisfactory coursework promptly to parents to allow time for corrective action, and
- promptly informing parents when a student is absent, with unexcused absences carrying penalties when they exceed a specified limit.

In all cases, schools can keep parents abreast of the following:

- academic progress
- homework policy and parent role
- attendance
- special scheduling concerns
- credits earned/needed
- post-secondary plans
- code of conduct/expectations
- student behavior and health
- testing for screening/placement
- special events (e.g, open house)
- extracurricular activities (e.g, athletic program)
- opportunities to help or support the school

(From: Gotts, E. E. Workshop materials from the Division of Child Development and Parenting, Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Charleston, West Virginia)

Forming Improvement Teams

Involving staff in planning for improvement is a key feature of successful change efforts. While districts and individual schools can accomplish this in a variety of ways, setting up a leadership or improvement team is one way to gain significant involvement for a solid core of staff, particularly teachers. Consequently, districts may wish to consider the following.

The improvement team (call the group a steering committee, if you like) is responsible for managing improvements in the school. They collect and review student performance data, describe school strengths and weaknesses, set improvement goals and targets, design school improvement strategies and plan for their implementation, check progress toward meeting improvement goals, and involve the full staff at key points in the improvement process.

In forming an improvement team, there are several factors districts might consider:

- Team Composition — Since the team manages improvement, members need good analytical skills with a history of good follow through. Staff opinion leaders make good team members because of their communication skills. Ideally, districts want to select a mix of talents to cover the range of activities present in the improvement project.
- Team size — A team of about seven or eight members seems about right. That includes three to six teachers, one or two building administrators and perhaps one central office resource person.
- Forming Teams — Alternatives include:

  Peer nominations — Teachers select participants from among their own ranks. This strategy can increase the team's credibility among school staff, but it may or may not result in selecting individuals with a broad range of talents and experiences.

  Principal's invitation — After reviewing staff capabilities, the principal invites selected individuals to join the team. This process can ensure team members have a mix of expertise, but there's also a potential that the team may appear "loaded" in the direction of the principal's agenda.

  Call for volunteers — The school publicizes the nature of the work to be done and welcomes volunteers. This course takes advantage of more highly motivated staff. It can work well when there are enough volunteers and they represent the kind of mix of staff capabilities the school seeks in its improvement team.

  Enlist an existing group — An existing group, such as department heads or a curriculum council, is enlisted to carry out the improvement team tasks. This strategy, however, is not recommended. The established group process can impede the group's work or members might emphasize department or classroom issues, for example.
- Helping Teams Get Started. Teams seem to work best when schools:

  Tell potential team members before they get involved what they will be expected to do so they can make reasoned decisions about participating in the improvement team.

  Describe the school improvement process overall and its intent to improve school and student performance.

  Emphasize that the team is a task group designed to

make decisions (with lots of input from others) and cause school improvement to occur.

Emphasize that a building perspective (as opposed to a classroom, grade level, or subject matter perspective) is needed at all times.

Emphasize that directing an improvement effort has both positive and negative dimensions. That is, although the team is able to influence the direction of the effort, it also "takes the heat" for decisions made.

Give a realistic picture of the kind and amount of effort that the team will need to expend (e.g., one meeting per week on their own time).

Set high expectations by emphasizing the importance of the group's role as a catalyst for improvement; describe the training available to help team members get the job done; and describe incentives that will be available for joining the improvement team.

(From the Goal Based Education Program, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon.)

Reviewing Schools' Conduct Codes

Districts wanting to make improvements in student behavior should begin by examining their own conduct toward students. By providing answers to the questions listed below, schools can identify problems with their conduct codes.

1. Does the school have a written code of conduct which describes acceptable student behavior?
2. Does the code outline criteria and consequences for unacceptable behavior...covering discipline, tardiness, and absenteeism?
3. Are there written procedures for using the code?
4. Are the administrative procedures easy and quick to administer?
5. Are students and staff familiar with the code?
6. Does disciplinary action quickly follow infractions?
7. Is disciplinary action always consistent with the code?
8. Is discipline administered in a neutral, matter-of-fact way?
9. Does discipline focus on the student's behavior, not on his or her personality?
10. Are students told why they are being disciplined, in terms of the code of conduct?
11. Are out-of-school suspensions or expulsions kept to a minimum?
12. Does follow-up action for absenteeism and tar-

diness occur within one school day?.

13. Do students perceive that discipline is fairly administered?
14. Does faculty express punitive or authoritarian attitudes toward students?

(Based on Gottfredson, G.D. and D.C. Daiger. *Disruption in six hundred classrooms.* (Report No. 289). Johns Hopkins University: Center for Social Organization of Schools, November 1979.

Organizing Classrooms for Excellence

An extensive body of research has identified teaching practices found to be effective in teaching basic skills to elementary and secondary students. The list below is not exhaustive but it pulls together some of the findings related to effective classroom management and instruction for teachers' consideration.

I. The Learning Environment

A. The effective teacher expects and requires students to:
   1. pay attention;
   2. work persistently toward completion of assignments;
   3. exhibit cooperative attitudes toward classmates; and
   4. concentrate on academic activities rather than on socializing.

B. The effective teacher:
   1. expects high achievement from all students, regardless of their entering ability levels;
   2. assumes the role of instructional leader;
   3. takes personal responsibility for students' learning;
   4. explicitly communicates expected behaviors and attitudes to students;
   5. praises students when praise is deserved;
   6. respects students contributions to class;
   7. is confident and enthusiastic;
   8. has individual, private contacts with students;
   9. allows more autonomy for higher achieving students and provides more directed instruction for lower achieving students; and
   10. runs an orderly classroom.

II. Classroom Administration

A. The effective teacher:
   1. has clear rules and procedures written and posted for students to read;
   2. teaches and reviews the rules with students from the beginning of the year;

3. treats time as a valuable resource by:
   (a) beginning class promptly,
   (b) quickly moving students from one activity to another,
   (c) arranging classrooms so that students may move to new areas or a new activity with little disruption,
   (d) arranging classrooms so all students can see blackboards and assignment sheets, and the teacher can see all students,
   (e) handling administrative matters quickly and efficiently and keeping class interruptions to a minimum.
4. is actively involved with students for most of the class time;
5. provides active instruction to much of the class and limits the time spent by students on seatwork;
6. holds students responsible for their behavior and assignments, particularly during individual study and seatwork;
7. monitors the classroom to check for appropriate behavior and success in accomplishing assigned work;
8. responds when (s)he sees a problem beginning to develop;
9. signals the appropriate behavior by using a previously taught signal or sign to warn students they're getting off task;
10. establishes eye contact with potentially disruptive students;
11. uses a variety of rewards to provide positive reinforcement to students who follow rules and procedures;
12. reprimands specific students, not the class as a whole;
13. cites specific rules being broken rather than making general requests for order;
14. enforces rules consistently;
15. focuses on the student's behavior, not on personality; and
16. warns students only once; the second time, the student is disciplined according to school rules.

III. Classroom Instruction

A. The effective teacher:
   1. secures students' attention before beginning;
   2. sets the state for learning by:

(a) spelling out objectives in clear, everyday language, or
(b) reviewing content of previous lessons in preparation for the upcoming presentation or discussion, or
(c) providing a rationale for the lesson so students understand its purpose.

3. takes an active role in presenting new material;
4. provides clear presentations;
5. presents material in small steps, especially when teaching lower-ability students;
6. engages in teacher-led discussion and student recitation rather than lengthy lecturing;
7. moves along at a reasonably brisk pace and maintains active participation by students;
8. during recitation, asks questions students can answer with a high degree of success;
9. varies the cognitive level of questions according to the students' ability levels and the teachers' instructional goals;
10. conducts controlled practice of new materials with the whole class, monitors students' responses carefully, and provides feedback to students;
11. checks for students' understanding of the new content;
12. gives a common seatwork assignment for a short time after the teacher is reasonably satisfied that students understand the content;
13. monitors the class and physically moves about the room during seatwork;
14. works individually with those students who may be confused or having trouble;
15. holds students accountable for both their assignment and use of time during seatwork;
16. avoids making long seatwork assignments;
17. regularly assigns some amount of homework that provides students with the opportunity for further drill and practice over the lesson;
18. not only assigns homework, but holds students accountable for accomplishing it;
19. checks homework and gives quizzes on the content;
20. plans student assessment so it causes minimal disruption to instruction and routines;
21. quickly reports testing results to students in terms of the objectives on which students were tested;

22. frequently monitors student learning, both formally and informally; and
23. reports assessment results to students in simple, clear language to help them understand and make improvements.

IV. Teaching Style

A. The effective teacher:

1. provides opportunity during instruction for extensive discussion or questioning;
2. initiates participation by one of several methods:
   (a) calling on specific students in a systematic manner,
   (b) accepting volunteers,
   (c) allowing students to answer without raising their hand or being called on, especially in lower-ability classes, or
   (d) waiting for some response from students, especially in lower ability classes.
3. probes, rephrases, prompts, or provides the correct answer to the question if the student gives an incorrect response;
4. accepts the substance of correct parts of an answer, if student gives partially correct answer, provides some feedback to the student, and moves the lesson along;
5. varies level of questions from single, simple, straightforward requests for verbatim recall with questions that require students to state an opinion or describe how they arrived at an answer;
6. stresses students' understanding of the meaning of the content in the question rather than the form of the students' responses;
7. when questioning students on a lesson, asks questions which students can answer at high rates of success, 70 percent for high-ability students and 80 percent for lower-ability students;
8. organizes instructional activities to provide studentswith interesting and meaningful activities;
9. uses grouping patterns to fit the task;
10. relates class content to the interest of the students;
11. follows the prescribed curriculum and moves through it quickly particularly with higher ability students;
12. relies on workbooks/textbooks, particularly at

the elementary level; and

13. in appropriate situations, uses special materials which are matched to the students' ability, especially with low-ability students.

(From Barnes, S. *Synthesis of Selected Research on Teaching Findings*. (Report No. 9009). Austin, Texas: Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, September 1981; and *Effective Schooling Practices*. Portland, Oregon: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1982.)

Preventing Student Misbehavior in the Classroom

Right now, there's a considerable focus on school and classroom discipline. The strategies below are ones teachers can institute to prevent students' misbehavior in the classroom.

Developing Classroom Rules and Procedures

Three major areas in which teachers can plan rules and procedures are:

- *Expected student behavior during instruction* (i.e., during teacher presentation, recitation, and discussion, testing, small group or project work, and seat work).
- *Student behavior before and after instruction* (e.g., roll call/attendance checks, pencil sharpening, getting materials from a supply shelf, waiting for materials to be distributed, bringing books and other supplies to class, and entering and leaving class).
- *Routines for handling administrative tasks* (e.g., recording absences, filling out office attendance forms, signing student passes permitting them to enter or leave class, processing absence excuses, and keeping track of papers, assignments, and tests).

Questions to consider include the following:

- How will students show they have questions or need help (e.g., raising hand, or coming forward during seatwork)? Is there a place set aside in the classroom for working with individual students who need help?
- Under what conditions may students leave their seats?
- Under what conditions may students leave the room to go to the bathroom or other locations? If students must leave the room, how many may go at a time and what type of permission will they need?
- What signal(s) will be used to get students' attention?
- Will the students work alone, in pairs, or in groups? How will these be assigned? Will students be allowed to talk to one another and/or to work together during seatwork?
- What will students do if they complete a seatwork

assignment early?

- What kinds of equipment will require special instructions or demonstration?
- What procedures will govern laboratory work or student projects?
- Are there safety routines and equipment that should be explained to students? What procedures do students need to know regarding fire and disaster drills? When and how will they learn the necessary procedures?
- What administrative matters need efficient handling at the beginning of the period? How will they be handled?
- If a student was absent on the previous day, what should (s)he do?
- When the tardy bell rings, what are students supposed to do? What is the procedure for tardy students?
- If public address announcements come on, what is expected of students?
- What materials are students expected to bring to class and/or have ready when the bell rings? Do they vary from day to day? If so, what procedures will be used to tell them what to bring on different days?
- What are the procedures for distributing and collecting books, supplies, and equipment? What responsibilities do students have for taking care of materials and equipment? What are the procedures for putting away supplies and equipment?
- What standards of neatness and decorum are required before dismissing the class? What are the procedures for dismissing the class?

Sometimes teachers allow students to participate in rule making. This increases student ownership of the rules and encourages them to assume responsibility for their behavior. Student participation takes several forms, including a discussion of why rules are needed, suggestions for particular rules, or identification of specific examples of general rules (e.g., what it means to "respect other persons").

Most teachers limit the domain in which student participation is acceptable. Areas off-limits include schoolwide rules and those policies essential to managing instruction.

Finally, many effective managers don't provide for extensive student choice or participation in rule setting. Instead, they present their rules and procedures clearly to students and provide reasonable explanations of the need for them.

Developing Student Accountability

Successful teachers encourage student accountability for work by:

- clarifying overall work requirements,
- communicating assignments and instructions to students,
- monitoring work in progress,
- establishing routines for checking and turning in work, and
- providing regular academic feedback to students.

Work Requirements

Successful teachers:

- Decide on a heading for students to use on their papers. Post a sample heading and go over it with students the first time they are to use it. Remind them of it several times during the early weeks of school and tell them the consequences of neglecting to use the proper heading (e.g., 5 points deducted from grade).
- Tell students before they start work what kind of paper to write on, whether to use pencil or ink, and whether they may write on the back of their paper.
- Decide on a policy for neatness. Students should know, for example, whether paper torn from spiral notebooks is acceptable. And they should know how to treat errors (e.g., draw a line through them, circle them, erase them), and how stringent the standards are about legibility.
- Develop a policy for dealing with incomplete work. Options include accepting it, but grading only what is done; subtracting the part not done from the grade; or accepting papers only when complete.
- Pay careful attention, especially at the beginning of the year, to the completion of assignments. Talk to a student the first time he or she fails to turn in an assignment. Give students extra help if needed, but require that the work be done.
- Call the parent(s) or send a note home immediately if a student neglects two assignments consecutively, or begins a pattern of skipping occasional assignments. The underlying principle is the same as with other inappropriate behavior: Stop it quickly and there will be fewer problems in the long run.
- Make due dates reasonable and clear and do not make exceptions without good cause. Insist that students turn in classwork before leaving class. Accept late homework only with a written excuse from parents, or impose a penalty.

- Establish procedures, such as posting weekly assignment lists on a bulletin board, so that students can find out about work they missed because of absence. Decide on a procedure for getting back work returned during their absence. Explain these procedures clearly, with reminders as necessary.

Communicating Assignments

Successful teachers:

- Post classroom assignments, or present them orally or in a syllabus.
- Post homework assignments either daily or weekly in a regular spot. Have students write down the assignments in a notebook or on an assignment sheet that will be accessible to them outside the classroom.
- Make clear the requirements and grading criteria for each assignment. Explain these to the class and encourage questions to prevent possible misunderstanding. If students' in-class performance is to be evaluated, tell them exactly how they will be rated (e.g., working quietly and cooperatively, and cleaning up) and how much weight (or how many points) each factor will carry. Use realistic grading criteria.
- In making a long-term or broad assignment, such as for a major project or paper, dictate in detail requirements to the students or provide a description of the requirements on a ditto for the students to keep for reference. Discuss these thoroughly with the students; give reminders as the due date nears.

Monitoring and Checking Work

Successful teachers:

- Whenever students begin *any* seatwork assignment, walk by *each* one to be sure that they are able to do the work correctly and that they have, in fact, started.
- If the assignment permits, get everyone started on seatwork by beginning as a class.
- Look around the classroom at frequent intervals and walk around periodically to check students' progress. Use eye contact or a brief word to keep students on task and help those who need assistance.
- Have all students participate in student recitations or class discussions.
- Establish routines for checking and turning in work. Explain exactly how students should exchange papers for checking.
- Decide on workable systems for getting students' completed papers and, when assigning work, make it clear which system to use (e.g., homework or timed

tests might be passed in a specific direction with no talking, or classwork might be put in a basket or under a paperweight by students as they finish).

- Hold students responsible for accurate work and accurate grading. Record the grades they assign and spot check the papers.

Academic Feedback

Successful teachers:

- Decide on the overall bases for grading (e.g., tests, daily assignments, papers, projects, notebooks, worksheets, quizzes, participation in class, and extra credit work). Decide what percent of a student's grade each will represent.
- Develop a manageable system for recording students' grades and performance.
- Plan classwork assignments, homework assignments, and checking activities, so that students receive a daily grade and keep informed of their progress.
- Have students keep a record of their grades. This enables them to see for themselves the effects of missing papers or low grades on their averages. This daily reminder will help motivate them to keep and/or do available extra credit work.
- Assess various stages of long-term projects to help keep students from trying to do the entire project in one night and to enable you to troubleshoot. Treat each portion as a completed assignment, with clear and specific requirements and due dates.

(From Emmer, E. T., Evertson, C. M., Sanford, J. P., Clements, B. S., & Worsham, M. E. *Organizing and Managing the Junior High Classroom* (Report 6151). Austin, Texas: Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, 1982, pp. 17-31, 45-57)

Measuring the Quality of School Life

Because students' reactions to school are rarely measured systematically, school staff generally have insufficient information: (1) to develop a clear picture of areas students feel need improving and (2) to judge the effectiveness of their attempts to develop a responsive school environment.

One instrument to help accomplish both these goals is the Quality of School Life scale (QSL) developed by the Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University.

The Quality of School Life (QSL) Scale

The Quality of School Life scale (QSL) is a multi-dimensional measure of students' reactions to their school in general, to their classroom, and to their teachers.

The 27-item QSL contains three subscales based on

three dimensions of the concept of quality of school life:

- The *Satisfaction with School* subscale (SWT) examines students' general reactions to school. Students who are more satisfied with school also are more likely to behave in socially acceptable ways and to help other students in school;
- The *Commitment to Classwork* subscale (COM) deals with the level of student interest in schoolwork. Students who find class assignments and projects more interesting and important may learn facts and concepts more completely, and may develop more positive attitudes toward learning; and
- The *Reactions to Teachers* subscale (TCH) focuses on student evaluations of instructional and personal interactions with teachers. These student-teacher relationships may, in fact, be the key to students' acceptance of goals, their understanding of school procedures, and their attitudes toward authority in and out of school.

Administering the Quality of Student Life Scale (QSL)

The QSL is designed for use with students in grades 4-12 to help teachers and administrators:

- Formally measure students' reactions to school in general, to their classroom, and to their teachers;
- Describe and monitor the conditions of school life; and
- Make decisions about the success of school programs.

The QSL questionnaire may be administered to small or large groups of students in about 20 minutes in most settings. Most students in grades 4-12 can read and interpret the items without difficulty. The QSL is easy to administer. And students show a very high interest in the survey. Most are eager to share their opinions in evaluating their school experiences.

The scoring system of the QSL is a simple tally of the number of positive evaluations for each subscale and for the total scale. The more positive the evaluations, the higher the affective quality of school life.

Suggested Uses

The use of QSL depends on classroom, school, or district needs. Some general QSL uses are:

- *General Assessment.* Along with accounts of facilities, curricular offerings, achievement test scores, staff qualifications and similar statistics, the QSL can

provide descriptive information to contribute to a comprehensive assessment of the conditions of school life.

- *Identifying Potential Dropouts.* As a predictive measure, the QSL may assist in the identification of potential dropouts. Combined with other measures of achievement, ability, and report card grades, low QSL scores may help "flag" students who benefit from special attention.
- *Feedback for teachers.* Monitoring students reactions to school life with the QSL can assist teachers in interpreting their own effectiveness or the responsiveness of particular programs.

(From Epstein, J. L., & McPartland, J. M. *The Quality of School Life Scale: Administration and Technical Manual.* Boston, Mass: Houghton Mifflin, Co., 1978. This manual provides directions for administering and scoring the QSL, research data for comparing scores, directions for constructing local norms, assistance in interpreting scores, information on the development and psychometric qualities of the scale, and suggested QSL uses.)

Additional information about The Quality of Life Scale is available from Riverside Publishing Co., 8420 Bryn Mawr Avenue, Chicago, IL 60631

Measuring Staff's Reaction to Change

A district or school is in a better position to provide targeted professional development opportunities for staff if everyone understands (1) the kinds of concerns staff have about the school improvement effort and (2) the kinds of skills the new program requires of participants.

One way to get a handle on these is to apply models, accompanying questionnaires, and interview schedules in the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) developed by the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, University of Texas, Austin.

Monitoring Concerns About an Innovation

Staff typically progress through stages of concern about new programs of any kind. These include personal, informational, and management concerns, as well as concerns about the innovations' effect on students.

At the first stage, there's little concern about, or involvement with, the innovation (awareness). Next, teachers develop an interest in learning more about the innovation and what is required to use it (information stage). This is followed by the personal stage of concern where staff raise uncertainties about the innovation's demands, their ability to meet those demands, and the ways in which the innovation will affect their roles and status. After these concerns are satisfied, staff begin to attend to issues surrounding use of the innovation during the management stage. Concerns about the innovation's impact on students follows. That is, attention focuses on the innovation's relevance for students, the evaluation of student outcomes, and changes

needed to increase student outcomes (consequence stage). Interest in working with other staff members to increase the effectiveness of the innovation follows (collaboration stage).

By the time teachers reach the last stage their concern focuses on whether other innovations exist that would achieve the same goals more effectively. Staff's attention centers on broadening their outlook, increasing professional growth, and achieving maximum outcomes for children and the school as a whole, all in relation to the thrust of the innovation.

Researchers have developed the Stages of Concern (SoC) questionnaire to help schools measure staff concerns about change. SoC consists of 35 items, each of which has a scale on which respondents indicate their present degree of concern about the topic described in the item. The questionnaire takes about 15 minutes to administer and can be scored easily. The questionnaire is reliable enough to provide information for planning change strategies.

Monitoring Level of Use of an Innovation

As staff move through the concerns, their familiarity with, and effectiveness in, using the strategies and practices the school effectiveness program encompasses also progresses. The research suggests several Levels of Use of an Innovation.

At the first level, attention focuses on finding out about the program by soliciting and/or reading general descriptions. After becoming familiar with it, a decision is made whether or not to use the program. (Note: In many cases use of the innovation is mandated, so this exploration activity is often not for the purpose of making a decision.)

Following such orientation, potential users learn details about the procedures and materials required to use the innovation by attending workshops, meetings or doing additional reading (preparation stage of use).

As staff begin to use the innovation, their use moves from mechanical to routine, and then to refined use. In the first, management is not yet very effective and it focuses on ways to meet day-to-day needs, problems and events. During routine use, the logistics and organization required by the program have been established and problems are handled routinely. By the time the staff have entered the refined use, changes in the use of the innovation are made based on its effects on students. At the final level, staff focus on looking for other innovations and new ideas to supplement the current innovation.

More Information on Measuring Staff Reactions To Change

Loucks, S.F., Newlove, B.W. & Hall, G.E. *Measuring Levels of Use of the Innovation: A Manual for Trainers, Interviewers, and Raters.* Austin, Texas: Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, 1976.

Hall, G.E., George, A.A., & Rutherford, W.L. *Measuring States of Concern About the Innovation: A Manual for Use of the SoC Questionnaire.* Austin, Texas: Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, 1977.

Newlove, B.W. & Hall, G.E. *A Manual for Assessing Open-ended Statements of Concern about an Innovation.* Austin, Texas: Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, 1976.

Parker, E.W. & Griffin, T.H. *A Quick Scoring Device for the Stages of Concern Questionnaire.* Austin, Texas: Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, 1979.

Matching Instruction and Testing

Striking a match between instruction and testing or "curriculum alignment," is accomplished by aligning three key elements (1) essential skills students must learn, (2) assessment procedures to measure students' skills, and (3) classroom instruction to impart these skills.

Elements To Align

1. *Essential Skills.* Many districts already have a list of objectives — at least for some subject matter areas. But a statement of objectives for each grade level may not be sufficient. Frequently, teachers have too many objectives to keep track of. As often, the objectives are so general they do not provide a definition of what students are expected to learn.

   Districts can identify a set of grade-by-grade skills students should acquire as they progress through school. This listing, selected on the basis of teacher input and an analysis of current practices and instructional materials, includes the essential skills students need to learn if they are to continue to benefit from the regular instructional program. The skills are not minimum competencies, nor are they all that should be included in a quality instructional program. However, with the identification of essential skills for each grade level, many of the uncertainties about selecting objectives are resolved.

2. *Assessment.* A test or assessment that samples the achievement of essential skills is another important part of an aligned curriculum. The test should be

one that measures only student accomplishments with respect to the essential skills.

There is, in fact, a well-developed technology for constructing such assessment instruments, and several school districts now have them in place. The instruments are called Instructional Accomplishment Inventory (IAI) systems. They provide school districts with information on students' learning and instruction — information they can use to improve schools.

IAI systems were developed by SWRL Educational Research and Development in Los Alamitos, California. IAI systems can be customized to any school subject or grade level. They consist of inventories of student proficiencies, computer-generated reports on students' performance, and inservice materials.

Inventories of student proficiencies are keyed to instructional materials in use, and assesss topics and critical skills that most students are likely to have had an opportunity to learn. Computer-generated reports of IAI information can be provided for individual students, classroom groups, whole classrooms, schools, regions within districts, districts, and states.

Individual Student Reports show how each student performed on "benchmark" areas. These are general areas of instruction that receive several teaching lessons (at least four or five) and are an important building block for the more advanced instruction students will receive at higher grade levels. Reports present an index of the things that the student was able or unable to do in each area.

Classroom Reports (which can also include a report on smaller, special instructional groups) list these same "benchmark" areas, but they also provide diagnostic information for teachers — skills measured by each survey item along with the percentage of students in the entire class who answered each item correctly.

School Reports are the same as the classroom reports, but they provide information grade by grade. More specifically, they show principals how students at each grade level performed. In addition, the reports break out results for the different textbook series that are being used at each grade level.

Area and District Reports show grade-by-grade information to administrators and curriculum spe-

cialists, and these reports look like those just described for school principals, except that results are summarized across the entire district, or by regions within a district.

3. *Classroom Instruction.* After the essential skills have been identified and an appropriate assessment system developed, the final part of an aligned curriculum is classroom instruction. Getting instruction to match or align with the essential skills is often the most difficult part of the alignment process. But it can be done, particularly in collaboration with organizations familiar with the technology of curriculum alignment.

A Step-by-Step Process

Five steps in the curriculum alignment instructional planning process are:

Step 1: Review the Essential Skills

In this step, teachers become familiar with the essential skills for their grade level. They can, for example, work in grade-level groups, discussing the essential skills and making sure that they have a consensus on what those objectives mean in terms of classroom instruction.

Step 2: Setting Priorities

Teachers identify specific priorities for instruction. While all of the essential skills need to be taught, teachers isolate a small number of skills for special attention. The assessment results of students for the previous year often show that certain skills need to be emphasized. Teacher judgment about the special needs of incoming students helps set priorities. Curriculum alignment stresses the importance of teachers acting as part of a grade-level group to set priorities.

Step 3: Planning Instruction

Once priorities have been set, teachers work (individually and in grade-level groups) to plan instruction for the year. Planning helps ensure that adequate time, as well as appropriate strategies and materials, are devoted to instruction on the essential skills. Teachers determine which instructional materials are most appropriate and the time it's likely to take for instruction.

Step 4: Checking Progress

Between Steps 3 and 4, teachers begin instruction. During the year, they continually monitor their progress in teaching the objectives; but at least once, no later than midway through the school year, teachers should meet formally to determine how well they are carrying out their instructional plans and how well students are learning the essential

skills. Based on this information, teachers can make necessary revisions so all students receive instruction in the essential skills before the end of the school year.

Step 5: Acknowledging Accomplishments and Planning Next Steps

Near the end of the year, teachers identify their accomplishments. They also discuss problems that arose during the year and identify ways to minimize or eliminate these problems in the future.

More Information on Matching Instruction and Testing

PVS Coordinator's Manual. Los Alamitos, Calif: SWRL Educational Research and Development, 1978.

Hanson, R., Schutz, R. & Bailey, J. *What Makes Achievement Tests Tick: Investigation of Alternative Instrumentation for Effective Program Evaluation.* Los Alamitos, Calif: SWRL Educational Research and Development, 1980.

Buchanan, A. & Milazzo, P. *Design Parameters for Development of an Information system from a Skills Framework.* Los Alamitos, Calif: SWRL Educational Research and Development, 1980.

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Defining a Program or Practice

In many cases, districts involved in school improvement efforts develop or adopt practices and programs that are new to staff. Consequently, they seek ways to clearly describe these "innovations" so school staff understand what to do to implement them and what to look for when evaluating them.

The NETWORK, Inc. in Andover, Massachusetts has developed the Practice Profile, a technique for defining a program or practice (we use the terms interchangeably) for school staff. The Profile provides a standardized, systematic and cost effective way to summarize program components. As important, it lays out requirements for putting the program in place.

Profile information is collected from the program's developer and those actually using the program, and from a review of written information about the program. Basically, the Profile describes what the program looks like in practice and what the program's developers believe must be present for it to be "in use."

Program Components

Program components listed in a Practice Profile fall into such categories as:

- Use of specific materials or content
- Testing or screening
- Recordkeeping
- Instructional activities
- Coordination activities
- Scheduling and pacing

A Practice Profile typically includes between six and 12 program components. Each is described behaviorally or in terms of what someone actually does. More specifically, the Profile describes behaviors associated with ideal use of each component, acceptable use, and unacceptable use. And these become guidelines for informing training and monitoring use by school staff.

Implementation Requirements

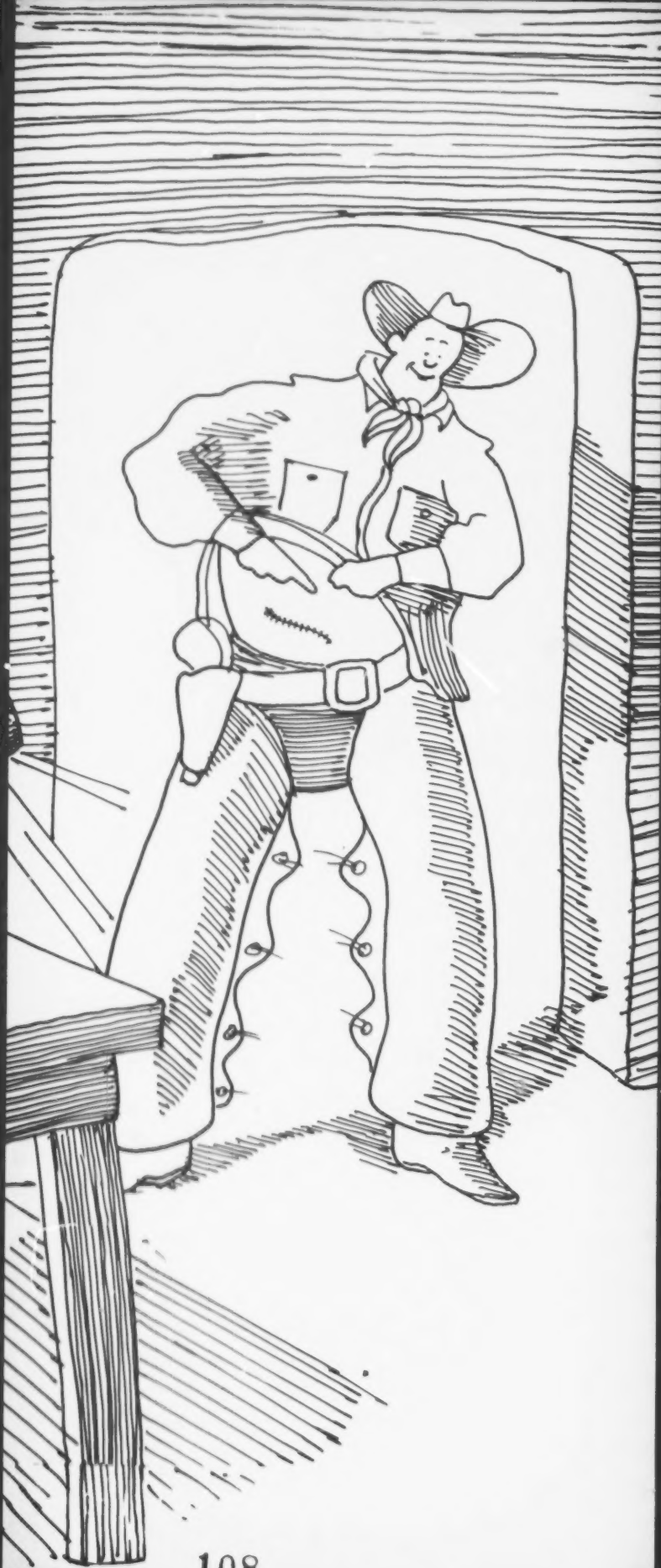
The Profile also describes what is required to implement the program or practice. That is, it includes specific information from developers about:

- Training requirements, preservice and inservice: length, content, and expected outcomes.
- Start-up and ongoing costs, both money and in-kind contributions.
- Materials and equipment needs.
- Personnel needs: instructors, aides, coordinators, tutors, etc.
- Facilities, time, and special scheduling needs.

Practice Characteristics

The final elements of a Practice Profile is a description and judgement of general characteristics of the program or practice. For example, a Profile includes a description of the program's purpose (e.g., remediation, basic skills development). And it includes a description of the program's instructional approach (e.g., prescriptive/diagnostic, experiential). Finally, Profile developers can rate the program on any number of dimensions including complexity, probable benefits, etc.

(From Loucks, S.F. and D.P. Crandall. *The Practice Profile: An All Purpose Tool for Program Communication, Staff Development, Evaluation and Improvement.* Andover, Massachusetts: The NETWORK, Inc., January 1982. The Practice Profile is based, in part, on a concept called Innovation Configurations developed by the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, Hall, G. and S. Loucks. *Innovation Configurations: Analysing the Adaptation of Innovations.* Austin, Texas: Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, 1978.)



Appendix A:

Additional Assistance from the CEDaR-Member Institutions

The Can-Do Guide was produced by the Council for Educational Development and Research (CEDaR), a Washington-based nonprofit association consisting of educational research and development organizations concerned about educational improvement. The organizations—six university-based educational research and development centers and nine nonprofit educational r&d agencies—are listed below.

This publication was developed under the auspices of a national school improvement program organized around the slogan, "Effective Schools Are America's Best Bet." The Best Bet program is a joint venture of the CEDaR-member institutions, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), and the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE). In addition, the National Education Association has lent its support to the program and publicized it among teachers.

The Best Bet program's goal is to help school district's in their self-improvement efforts. It provides this assistance through "Best Bet" clinics for school personnel and through "Best Bet" publications. *The Can-Do Guide* is the second "Best Bet" publication produced by CEDaR. The first, a 53-page pamphlet on microcomputers, *The Educator's Unauthorized Microcomputer Survival Manual,* is available from CEDaR (price: $4.50 per copy).

The Can-Do Guide and *The Educator's Unauthorized Microcomputer Survival Manual* mirror the "Best Bet" program's focus: to help school districts use the results of educational research and development in two areas—effective school practices and educational technology.

The program also offers free-of-charge clinics on either topic to interested school districts. The clinics are offered either onsite at the district or in cooperation with an already planned AASA conference. During the clinics,

school personnel have the opportunity to review their current practices, match these with known effective practices, and discuss how improvements might be made. In clinics focusing on educational technology, staff explore issues and clarify problems in the use of technology in education.

Because school improvement is a long-term effort, "Best Bet" clinics only provide districts with information that might prompt a major self-improvement effort. A district that desires further involvement (inservice training, instructional leadership, curriculum revisions, etc.) may wish to seek additional assistance from a CEDaR-member institution. However, a "Best Bet" clinic does not obligate a district to any further involvement with the CEDaR institutions.

To become involved in the "Best Bet" program, school superintendents or school board presidents can simply contact the laboratory serving their region. Because the six New England states are not currently served by a laboratory, interested superintendents and board members can contact a cooperating CEDaR-member institution, The NETWORK, Inc.

CEDaR Members Providing "Best Bet" Clinics

Appalachia Educational Laboratory
P.O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325
304/347-0400
Contact: Jack Sanders
States Served: Alabama, Kentucky, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia

Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development
1855 Folsom Street
San Francisco, CA 94103
415/565-3000
Contact: C. Lynn Jenks
States Served: Northern California, Nevada (except Clark County), Utah

Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory
2600 South Parker Road
Building 5, Suite 353
Aurora, CO 80014
303/337-0990

Contact: C.L. Hutchins
States Served: Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
300 S.W. Sixth Avenue
Portland, OR 97204
503/248-6800
Contact: Tom Olsen
States Served: Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington

Research for Better Schools
444 North Third Street
Philadelphia, PA 19123
215/574-9300
Contact: John E. Hopkins
States Served: New Jersey, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Delaware

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
211 East Seventh Street
Austin, TX 78701
512/476-6861
Contact: Preston C. Kronkosky
States Served: Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas

SWRL Educational Research and Development
4665 Lampson Avenue
Los Alamitos, CA 90720
213/598-7661
Contact: Richard E. Schutz
States Served: Southern California, Nevada (Clark County), Arizona

The NETWORK, Inc.
290 South Main Street
Andover, MA 01810
617/470-1080
Contact: Susan Loucks
States Served: Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island Vermont, Connecticut, Massachusetts

Cooperating CEDaR-Member Institutions

Center for Educational Policy and Management
University of Oregon
Robert H. Mattson, director

Center for Social Organization of Schools
Johns Hopkins University
Edward McDill, James McPartland, co-directors

Center for the Study of Evaluation
University of California, Los Angeles
Eva L. Baker, director

Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance
Stanford University
Henry M. Levin, director

National Center for Research in Vocational Education
Ohio State University
Robert E. Taylor, executive director

Research and Development Center for Teacher Education
University of Texas, Austin
Gene Hall, acting director

Appendix B

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